

E S S A Y S
ON
SHAKESPEARE'S
DRAMATIC CHARACTERS
OF
RICHARD THE THIRD, KING LEAR,
AND TIMON OF ATHENS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED, AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
FAULTS OF SHAKESPEARE;
AND
ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
CHARACTER OF HAMLET.
THE SECOND EDITION.

By MR. RICHARDSON,
PROFESSOR OF HUMANITY IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF GLASGOW.

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THE
DRAUGHTS
RICHARD THE THIRD
AND THE
OF

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TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE THE
VISCOUNTESS OF STORMONT,
THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS
ARE
MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,
BY HER LADYSHIP'S
MOST OBEDIENT,
AND DEVOTED SERVANT,
WILLIAM RICHARDSON.

Glasgow-College, }
Nov. 5, 1783. }

RIGHT HONOURABLE THE

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS

ARE

PRESENTED TO THE

BY THE EDITOR

OF THE

AND DEBATED

WILLIAM LAMBERT

1800

P R E F A C E.

I VENTURED, some years ago, to publish a "*Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters.*" In the Introductory Essay I explained the nature of my design: and of that Essay a very neat abstract was given in a periodical publication. With the author I am unacquainted; nor, indeed, have I ever discovered who the indulgent Critic was, to whom I was so much indebted. I hope, however, he will excuse me for making use of his labours; it is to inform those readers who may have forgotten, or not have seen my former work, concerning the object of the following investigations; and to save them and myself the trouble of repeating what I had formerly written.

The abstract is in the following words:
"The preliminary reflections shew the importance of experiment, as well in the philosophy

“ *sophy of mind as of body ; but they discover*
“ *at the same time, how much more arduous*
“ *and difficult it must prove, to pursue a course*
“ *of mental, than of corporeal experiments.*
“ *The qualities of body are fixed ; the laws*
“ *by which they operate, determined : so that*
“ *in physical experiments, if the process be*
“ *right, the result must be uniform. The*
“ *operations of mind, however, are more com-*
“ *plex ; its motions are progressive ; its tran-*
“ *sitions abrupt and instantaneous ; its atti-*
“ *tudes uncertain and momentary. The pas-*
“ *sions pursue their course with celerity ; their*
“ *direction may be changed, or their impe-*
“ *tusosity modified by a number of causes, which*
“ *are far from being obvious, and which fre-*
“ *quently escape our observation. It would,*
“ *therefore, be of great importance to philoso-*
“ *phical scrutiny, if the position of the mind, in*
“ *any given circumstances, could be fixed till*
“ *it was deliberately surveyed ; if the causes,*
“ *which alter its feelings and operations, could*
“ *be accurately shewn, and their effects ascer-*
“ *tained*

P R E F A C E. vii

"tained with precision. To accomplish these
 "ends, according to our author, dramatic
 "poetry may be of the greatest use. Among
 "dramatic writers, none has more happily
 "and successfully delineated the human cha-
 "racter, in all its indefinite varieties, than
 "Shakespeare. Our observer, therefore, pro-
 "ceeds to contemplate this faithful mirror, and
 "to discover the various influence of external
 "causes upon the images which it reflects.
 "This gives him at once, an opportunity of
 "shewing how true to nature the poet is in
 "his conceptions; and of deducing such re-
 "flections from his discoveries, as may both
 "enlighten the theory, and facilitate the prac-
 "tice of virtue."

The following Discourses were written at
 different times; and read before a Literary
 Society in the College of Glasgow. Though
 the approbation they met with there, must
 necessarily have been very flattering; yet, I
 offer them to my Readers with the utmost
 deference, well knowing, that judgments, in-

fluenced by private friendship, may be very different from the decrees of an impartial Public. As I am desirous of rendering poetry subservient to a higher end than mere amusement, whatsoever may be the success of my endeavours, I hope the lovers of poetry will receive them with indulgence.

E S S A Y

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

E S S A Y I.

ON THE

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

KING RICHARD THE THIRD.

THE "Life and Death of King
"Richard the Third" is a popular
tragedy: yet the poet, in his principal
character, has connected deformity of
body with every vice that can pollute
human nature. Nor are those vices dis-
guised or softened. The hues and line-
aments are as dark and as deeply impressed
as we are capable of conceiving. Nei-
ther do they receive any considerable miti-
gation from the virtues of any other
persons

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persons represented in the poem. The vices of Richard are not to serve as a foil or a test to *their* virtues; for the virtues and innocence of others serve no other purpose than to aggravate his hideous guilt. In reality, we are not much attached by affection, admiration, or esteem, to any character in the tragedy. The merit of Edward, Clarence, and some others, is so undecided, and has such a mixture of ~~weakness~~, as hinders us from entering deeply into their interests. Richmond is so little seen, his goodness is so general or unfeatured, and the difficulties he has to encounter are so remote from view, are thrown, if I may use the expression, so far into the back ground, and are so much lessened by concurring events, that he cannot, with any propriety, be deemed the hero of the performance. Neither does the pleasure we receive proceed entirely from the gratification of our resentment, or the due display

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 5

play of poetical justice. To be pleased with such a display, it is necessary that we enter deeply into the interests of those that suffer. But so strange is the structure of this tragedy, that we are less interested in the miseries of those that are oppressed, than we are moved with indignation against the oppressor. The sufferers, no doubt, excite some degree of compassion; but, as we have now observed, they have so little claim to esteem, are so numerous and disunited, that no particular interest of this sort takes hold of us during the whole exhibition. Thus, were the pleasure we receive to depend solely on the fulfilment of poetical justice, that half of it would be lost which arises from great regard for the sufferers, and esteem for the hero who performed the exploit. We may also add, that if the punishment of Richard were to constitute our chief enjoyment, that event is put off for too long a period. The poet might

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have exhibited his cruelties in shorter space, sufficient; however, to excite our resentment; and so might have brought us sooner to the catastrophe, if that alone was to have yielded us pleasure. In truth, the catastrophe of a good tragedy is only the completion of our pleasure, and not the chief cause of it. The fable, and the view which the poet exhibits of human nature, conducted through a whole performance, must produce our enjoyment. But in the work now before us there is scarcely any fable; and there is no character of eminent importance, but that of Richard. He is the principal agent; and the whole tragedy is an exhibition of guilt, where abhorrence for the criminal is much stronger than our interest in the sufferers, or esteem for those, who, by accident rather than great exertion, promote his downfall. We are pleased, no doubt, with his punishment; but the display of his enormities, and their progress
to

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 7

to this completion, are the chief objects of our attention. Thus Shakespeare, in order to render the shocking vices of Richard an amusing spectacle, must have recourse to other expedients than those usually practised in similar situations. Here, then, we are led to enquire into the nature of these resources and expedients: for why do we not turn from the Richard of Shakespeare, as we turn from his Titus Andronicus? Has he invested him with any charm, or secured him by some secret talisman from disgust and aversion? The subject is curious, and deserves our attention.

Here, then, we may observe in general, that the appearance is produced, not by veiling or contrasting offensive features and colours, but by so connecting them with agreeable qualities residing in the character itself, that the disagreeable effect is either entirely suppressed, or by its union with coalescing qualities, is converted

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verted into a pleasurable feeling *. In particular, though Richard has no sense of justice, nor indeed of any moral obligation, he has an abundant share of those qualities which are termed intellectual. Destitute of virtue, he possesses ability. He shews discernment of character; artful contrivance in forming projects; great address in the management of mankind; fertility of resource; a prudent command of temper; much versatility of deportment; and singular dexterity in concealing his intentions. He possesses along with these, such perfect consciousness of the superior powers of his own understanding above those of other men, as leads him not ostentatiously to treat them with contempt, but to employ them, while he really contemns their weakness, as engines of his ambition. Now, though these properties are not the objects of moral

* See Hume's Essay on Tragedy.

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moral approbation, and may be employed as the instruments of fraud no less than of justice, yet the native and unmingled effect which *most* of them produce on the spectator, independent of the principle that employs them, is an emotion of pleasure. The person possessing them is regarded with deference, with respect, and with admiration. Thus, then, the satisfaction we receive in contemplating the character of Richard, in the various situations in which the poet has shewn him, arises from a mixed feeling; a feeling, compounded of horror, on account of his guilt; and of admiration, on account of his talents. By the concurrence of these two emotions the mind is thrown into a state of unusual agitation; neither painful nor pleasant, in the extremes of pain or of pleasure, but strangely * delightful. Surprise and amazement, excited by the

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striking

* *Lætatur turbidum.* Hor.

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striking conjunctures which he himself very often occasions, and which give exercise to his talents, together with astonishment at the determined boldness and success of his guilt, give uncommon force to the general impression.

It may be apprehended, that the mixed feelings now mentioned may be termed indignation; nor have I any objection to the use of the term. Indignation seems to arise from a comparative view of two objects; the one worthy, and the other unworthy; which are, nevertheless, united; but which, on account of the wrong or impropriety occasioned by this incongruous union, we conceive should be disunited and independent. The man of merit suffering neglect or contempt, and the unworthy man raised to distinction, provoke indignation. In like manner, indignation may be provoked, by seeing illustrious talents perverted to inhuman and perfidious purposes. Nor is the feeling,
for

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for it arises from elevation of soul and consciousness of virtue, by any means disagreeable. Indeed, the pleasure it yields us is different from that arising from other emotions of a more placid and softer character; different, for example, in a very remarkable manner, from our sympathy with successful merit. We may also observe, that suspense, wonder, and surprise, occasioned by the actual operation of great abilities, under the guidance of uncontrolled inhumanity, by their awful effects, and the postures they assume, together with anxiety to see an union so unworthy dissolved, give poignancy to our indignation, and annex to it, if I may use the expression, a certain wild and alarming delight.

But, by what term soever we recognise the feeling, I proceed to illustrate, by a particular analysis of some striking scenes in the tragedy, "that the pleasure we receive from the Character of Richard, "is

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"is produced by those emotions which
"arise in the mind, on beholding great
"intellectual ability employed for inhu-
"man and perfidious purposes."

I. In the first scene of the tragedy we have the loathsome deformity of Richard displayed, with such indications of mind as altogether suppress our aversion. Indeed the poet, in the beginning of Richard's soliloquy, keeps that deformity to which he would reconcile us, out of view; nor mentions it till he throws discredit upon its opposite: this he does indirectly. He possesses the imagination with dislike at those employments which are the usual concomitants of grace and beauty. The means used for this purpose are suited to the artifice of the design. Richard does not inveigh with grave and with solemn declamation against the sports and pastime of a peaceful Court: they are unworthy of such serious assault. He treats them with irony: he scoffs at them; does not blame, but despise them.

Now

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 13

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths;
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments;
Our stern alarms changed to merry meetings;
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
Grim-visaged war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front;
And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds,
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber,
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.

By thus throwing discredit on the usual attendants of grace and beauty, he lessens our esteem for those qualities; and proceeds with less reluctance to mention his own hideous appearance. Here, too, with great judgment on the part of the poet, the speech is ironical. To have justified or apologized for deformity with serious argument, would have been no less ineffectual than a serious charge against beauty. The intention of Shakespeare is not to make us admire the monstrous deformity of Richard, but to make us endure it.

But I that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an am'rous looking-glass;

I that

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I that am rudely stamp'd, and want Love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world; scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionably,
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them:
Why I (in this weak piping time of peace)
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to see my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity:
And, therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determin'd to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

His contempt of external appearance, and the easy manner in which he considers his own defects, impress us strongly with the apprehension of his superior understanding. His resolution, too, of not acquiescing tamely in the misfortune of his form, but of making it a motive for him to exert his other abilities, gives us an idea of his possessing great vigour and strength of mind. Not dispirited with his

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his deformity, it moves him to high exertion. Add to this, that our wonder and astonishment are excited at the declaration he makes of an atrocious character; of his total insensibility; and resolution to perpetrate the blackest crimes.

Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the king
In deadly hate, the one against the other;
And if King Edward be as true and just,
As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up.

It may be said, perhaps, that the colouring here is by far too strong, and that we cannot suppose characters to exist so full of deliberate guilt, as thus to contemplate a criminal conduct without subterfuge, and without imposing upon themselves. It may be thought, that even the Neros and the Domitians, who disgraced human nature, did not consider themselves

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themselves so atrociously wicked as they really were; but, transported by lawless passions, deceived themselves, and were barbarous without perceiving their guilt. It is difficult to ascertain what the real state of such perverted characters may be; nor is it a pleasing task to analyse their conceptions*. Yet the view which Shakespeare has given us of Richard's sedate and deliberate guilt, knowing that his conduct was really guilty, is not inconsistent. He only gives a deeper shade to the darkness of his character. With his other enormities and defects, he represents him incapable of feeling, though he may perceive the difference between virtue and vice. Moved by unbounded ambition; vain of his intellectual and political talents; conceiving himself, by reason of his deformity, as of a different species from the rest of mankind; and
inured

* Butler.

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inured from his infancy to the barbarities perpetrated during a desperate civil war; surely it is not incompatible with his character, to represent him incapable of feeling those pleasant or unpleasant sensations that usually, in other men, accompany the discernment of right and of wrong. I will indeed allow, that the effect would have been as powerful, and the representation would have been better suited to our ideas of human nature, had Richard, both here and in other scenes, given indication of his guilt rather by obscure hints and surmises, than by an open declaration.

II. In the scene between Richard and Lady Anne, the attempt seems as bold, and the situation as difficult, as any in the tragedy.

It seems, indeed, altogether wild and unnatural, that Richard, deformed and hideous as the poet represents him, should offer himself a suitor to the widow of an excellent

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excellent young prince whom he had slain, at the very time she is attending the funeral of her husband, and while she is expressing the most bitter hatred against the author of her misfortune. But, in attending to the progress of the dialogue, we shall find ourselves more interested in the event, and more astonished at the boldness and ability of Richard, than moved with abhorrence at his shameless effrontery, or offended with the improbability of the situation.

In considering this scene, it is necessary that we keep in view the character of Lady Anne. The outlines of this character are given us in her own conversation; but we see it more completely finished and filled up, indirectly indeed, but not less distinctly, in the conduct of Richard. She is represented by the poet, of a mind altogether frivolous; incapable of deep affection; guided by no steady principles of virtue, produced or strengthened

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ened by reason and reflection; the prey of vanity, which is her ruling passion; susceptible of every feeling and emotion; sincere in their expression while they last; but hardly capable of distinguishing the propriety of one more than another; and so exposed alike to the influence of good and of bad impressions. There are such characters: persons of great sensibility, of great sincerity, of no rational or steady virtue, and consequently of no consistency of conduct. They now amaze us with their amiable virtues; and now confound us with apparent vices.

Richard, in his management of Lady Anne, having in view the accomplishment of his ambitious designs, addresses her with the most perfect knowledge of her constitution. He knows that her feelings are violent; that they have no foundation in steady determined principles of conduct; that violent feelings are soon exhausted; and that the undecided mind,

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without

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without choice or sense of propriety, is equally accessible to the next that occur. All that he has to do, then, is to suffer the violence of one emotion to pass away, and then, as skilfully as possible, to bring another, more suited to his designs, into its place. Thus he not only discovers much discernment of human nature, but also great command of temper, and great dexterity of conduct.

In order, as soon as possible, to exhaust her temporary grief and resentment, it is necessary that they be swollen and exasperated to their utmost measure. In truth, it is resentment, rather than grief, which she expresses in her lamentation for Henry. Accordingly Richard, inflaming her disorder to its fiercest extreme, breaks in abruptly upon the funeral procession. This stimulates her resentment; it becomes more violent, by his appearing altogether cool and unconcerned at her abuse; and
2 thus

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thus she vents her emotion in fierce invectives and imprecations :

O God, which this blood mad'ft, revenge his death !
O earth, which this blood drink'ft, revenge his death !
Or heav'n, with light'ning strike the murderer dead !
Or earth, gape open wide, and eat him quick !

This invective is general. But before the vehemence of this angry mood can be entirely abated, she must bring home to her fancy every aggravating circumstance, and must ascertain every particular wrong she has suffered. When she has done this, and expressed the consequent feelings, she has no longer any topics or food for anger, and the passion will of course subside. Richard, for this purpose, pretends to justify or to extenuate his seeming offences ; and thus, instead of concealing his crimes, he overcomes the resentment of Lady Anne, by bringing his cruelties into view. This has also the effect of impressing her with the belief of his candour.

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Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman,
Of these supposed crimes, to give me leave,
By circumstance but to acquit myself, &c.

ANNE. Didst thou not kill this king?

GLO. I grant ye.

ANNE. Dost thou grant me? then God grant me, too,
Thou may'st be damned for that wicked deed.

Here also we may observe the application of those flatteries and apparent obsequiousness, which, if they cannot take effect at present, otherwise than to give higher provocation, yet, when her wrath subsides, will operate in a different direction, and tend to excite that vanity which is the predominant disposition of her mind, and by means of which he will accomplish his purpose.

It was not alone sufficient to provoke her anger and her resentment to the utmost, in order that they might immediately subside; but by alledging apparent reasons for change of sentiment, to assist them in their decline. Though Lady Anne possesses no decided, determined virtue,

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virtue, yet her moral nature, uncultivated as it appears, would discern impropriety in her conduct; would suggest scruples, and so produce hesitation. Now, in order to prevent the effect of these, it was necessary to aid the mind in finding subterfuge or excuse, and thus assist her in the pleasing business of imposing upon herself. Her seducer accordingly endeavours to gloss his conduct, and represents himself as less criminal than she at first apprehended.

To leave this keen encounter of our wits,
And fall something into a slower method:
Is not the causer of the timeless deaths
Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,
As blameful as the executioner?

ANNE. Thou wast the cause, and most accurs'd
effect.

GLO. Your beauty was the cause of that effect:
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep, &c.

In these lines, besides a confirmation
of the foregoing remark, and an illustra-

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tion of Richard's persevering flattery, there are two circumstances that mark great delicacy and fineness of pencil in Shakespeare's execution of this striking scene. The invective and resentment are now so mitigated and brought down, that the conversation, assuming the more patient form of dialogue, is not so much the expression of violent passion, as a contest for victory in a smart dispute, and becomes a "keen encounter of wits." The other circumstance to be observed is, that Richard, instead of speaking of her husband and father-in-law, in the relation in which they stood to her, falls in with the subsiding state of her affection towards them, and using terms of great indifference, speaks of "these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward."

Lady Anne having listened to the conversation of Richard, after the first transport of her wrath on the subject of Edward's death, shewed that the real force
of

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 25

of the passion was abating; and it seems to be perfectly subdued, by her having listened to his exculpation. In all this, the art of the poet is wonderful; and the skill he ascribes to Richard, profound. Though the crafty seducer attempts to justify his conduct to Lady Anne, he does not seek to convince her reason; for she had no reason worth the pains of convincing; but to afford her some means and opportunity to vent her emotion. When this effect is produced, he proceeds to substitute some regard for himself in its place. As we have already observed, he has been taking measures for this purpose in every thing he has said; and by soothing expressions of adulation during the course of her anger, he was gradually preparing her mind for the more pleasing, but not less powerful, dominion of vanity. In the foregoing lines, and in what follows, he ventures a declaration of the passion he entertains for her. Yet he

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does this indirectly, as suggested by the tendency of their argument, and as a reason for those parts of his conduct that seem so heinous:

Your beauty was the cause, &c.

Richard was well aware, that a declaration of love from him would of course renew her indignation. He accordingly manages her mind in such a manner as to soften its violence, by suggesting the idea of his passion, in the part of the dialogue containing, in his language, the "keen encounter of their wits," as a matter not altogether serious; and afterwards when he announces it more seriously, by mentioning it as it were by chance, and indirectly. Still, however, with those precautions to introduce the thought with an easy and familiar appearance, it must excite violent indignation. Here, therefore, as in the former part of the scene, he must have recourse to the
same

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same command of temper, and to the same means of artfully irritating her emotion, till it entirely subsides. Accordingly, he adheres without deviation to his plan; he persists in his adulation; provokes her anger to its utmost excess; and finally, by varying the attitudes of his flatteries, by assuming an humble and suppliant address, he subdues and restores her soul to the ruling passion. In the close of the dialogue, the decline of her emotion appears distinctly traced. It follows the same course as the passion she expresses in the beginning of the scene. She is at first violent; becomes more violent; her passion subsides; yet, some ideas of propriety wandering across her mind, she makes an effort to recal her resentment. The effort is feeble; it only enables her to express contempt in her aspect; and at last she becomes the prey of her vanity. In the concluding part of the dialogue, she does not, indeed, directly
comply

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comply with the suit of Richard, but indicates plainly that total change in her disposition which it was his purpose to produce.

III. We shall now consider the manner in which Richard manages his accomplices, and those from whom he derives his assistance in the fulfilment of his designs.

We discern in his conduct towards them, as much at least as in their own deportment, the true colour of their characters: we discern the full extent of their faculties, and the real value of their virtues. According as they are variously constituted, his treatment of them varies. He uses them all as the tools of his ambition; but assumes an appearance of greater friendship and confidence towards some than towards others. He is well acquainted with the engines he would employ: he knows the compass of their powers, and discovers great dexterity in his

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his manner of moving and applying them. To the Mayor and his followers he affects an appearance of uncommon devotion and piety; great zeal for the public welfare; a scrupulous regard for the forms of law and of justice; retirement from the world; aversion to the toils of state; much trust in the good intentions of a magistrate so conspicuous; still more in his understanding; and by means of both, perfect confidence in his power with the people.— Now, in this manner of conducting himself, who is not more struck with the address and ability displayed by Richard, and more moved with curiosity to know their effects, than shocked at his hypocrisy and base deceit? Who does not distinctly, though indirectly, indeed, discern the character of the Mayor? The deportment of Richard is a glass that reflects every limb, every lineament, and every colour, with the most perfect truth and propriety.

What,

28 DRAMATIC CHARACTER

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What,

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What, think you we are Turks or Infidels,
Or that we would, against the form of law,
Proceed thus rashly in the villain's death? &c.

Alas! why would you heap those cares on me?
I am unfit for State or Majesty, &c.

The behaviour of Richard towards Buckingham is still more striking and peculiar. The situation was more difficult, and his conduct appears more masterly. Yet, as in former instances, the outlines and sketch of Buckingham's character are filled up in the department of his seducer.

This accomplice possesses some talents, and considerable discernment of human nature: his passions are ardent; he has little zeal for the public welfare, or the interests of virtue or religion; yet, to a certain degree, he possesses humanity and a sense of duty. He is moved with the love of power and of wealth. He is susceptible, perhaps, of envy against those
who

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who arise to such pre-eminence as he thinks might have suited his own talents and condition. Possessing some political abilities, or at least possessing that cunning, that power of subtle contrivance, and that habit of activity, which sometimes pass for political abilities, and which, imposing upon those who possess them, make them fancy themselves endowed with the powers of distinguished statesmen; he values himself for his talents, and is desirous of displaying them. Indeed, this seems to be the most striking feature in his character; and the desire of exhibiting his skill and dexterity, appears to be the foremost of his active principles. Such a person is Buckingham; and the conduct of Richard is perfectly consonant. Having too much penetration, or too little regard to the public weal, to be blindfolded or imposed upon like the Mayor, Richard treats him with apparent confidence. Moved, perhaps,

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haps, with envy against the kindred of the Queen, or the hope of pre-eminence in consequence of their ruin, he concurs in the accomplishment of their destruction, and in assisting the Usurper to attain his unlawful preferment. But above all, excessively vain of his talents, Richard borrows aid from his counsels, and not only uses him as the tool of his designs, but seems to share with him in the glory of their success. Knowing, too, that his sense of virtue is faint, or of little power, and that the secret exultation and triumph for over-reaching their adversaries, will afford him pleasure sufficient to counter-balance the pain that may arise in his breast from the perpetration of guilt, he makes him, in a certain degree, the confident of his crimes. It is also to be remarked, that Buckingham, elated with the hope of reward, and elated still more with vanity in the display of his talents, appears more active than the Usurper himself;

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 33

himself; more inventive in the contrivance of expedients, and more alert in their execution. There are many such persons, the instruments of designing men: persons of some ability, of less virtue, who derive consequence to themselves, by fancying they are privy to the vices or designs of men whom they respect, and who are lifted with triumph in the fulfilment of crafty projects. Richard, however, sees the slightness of Buckingham's mind, and reveals no more of his projects and vices than he reckons expedient for the accomplishment of his purpose: for, as some men, when at variance, so restrain their resentments as to leave room for future reconciliation and friendship; so Richard manages his seeming friendships, as to leave room, without the hazard of material injury to himself, for future hatred and animosity. A rupture of course ensues, and in a manner perfectly compatible with both of their characters.

Richard

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Richard wishes for the death of his brother Edward's children; and that his friend should on this, as on former occasions, partake of the shame or the glory. But here the ambition or envy of Buckingham had no particular concern; nor was there any great ability requisite for the assassination of two destitute infants. Thus his humanity and sense of duty, feeble as they were, when exposed to stronger principles, not altogether extinguished, were left to work uncontrouled; and consequently would suggest hesitation. They might be aided in their operation by the insatiate desire of reward for former services, not gratified according to promise or expectation; and, by the same invidious disposition, transferred from the ruined kindred of the Queen to the successful Usurper. Richard, somewhat aware that this project was more likely to encounter scruples than any of the former, hints his design with caution: he insinuates it with

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 35

acknowledgment of obligation; and endeavours to anticipate his conscience, by suggesting to him, along with this acknowledgment, the recollection of former guilt. Not aware, however, of the force contained in the resisting principles, and apprehending that the mind of his assistant was now as depraved as he desired, he hazards too abruptly the mention of his design. The consequence, in perfect consistency with both their natures, is coldness and irreconcilable hatred.

RICH. Stand all apart.—Cousin of Buckingham—

BUCK. My gracious Sovereign!

RICH. Give me thy hand. Thus high, by thy advice
And thy assistance, is King Richard seated:

But shall we wear these glories for a day?

Or shall they last, and we rejoice in them?

BUCK. Still live they, and for ever let them last.

RICH. Ah, Buckingham! now do I play the touch,
To try if thou be current gold indeed:

Young Edward lives! think now what I would speak.

BUCK. Say on, my loving Lord.

RICH. Why, Buckingham, I say I would be King.

BUCK. Why, so you are, my thrice renowned

Liege.

C

RICH.

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RICH. Ha ! am I a King ?—'Tis so—but Edward
lives—

BUCK. True, noble Prince.

RICH. O bitter consequence !

That Edward still should live—True, noble Prince—

Cousin, thou wert not wont to be so dull.

Shall I be plain ? I wish the bastards dead,

And I shall have it suddenly perform'd.

What say'st thou now ? Speak suddenly—be brief.

BUCK. Your Grace may do your pleasure.

RICH. Tut, tut, thou art all ice ; thy kindness
freezes :

Say, have I thy consent that they shall die ?

BUCK. Give me some breath, some little pause,
dear Lord,

Before I positively speak in this :

I will resolve your Grace immediately.

CATES. The King is angry ; see, he gnaws his lip.

The conduct of Richard to Catesby is different from his deportment towards the Mayor or Buckingham. Regarding him as totally unprincipled, servile, and inhuman, he treats him like the meanest instrument of his guilt. He treats him without respect for his character, without management of his temper, and without the least
appre-

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 37

apprehension that he has any feelings that will shudder at his commands.

IV. We shall now consider the decline of Richard's prosperity, and the effect of his conduct on the fall of his fortunes.

By dissimulation, perfidy, and bloodshed, he paves his way to the throne: by the same inhuman means he endeavours to secure his pre-eminence; and has added to the list of his crimes, the assassination of his wife and his nephews. Meanwhile he is laying a snare for himself. Not Richmond, but his own enormous vices, proved the cause of his ruin. The cruelties he perpetrates, excite in the minds of his men, hatred, indignation, and the desire of revenge. But such is the deluding nature of vice, that of this consequence he is little aware. Men who lose the sense of virtue, transfer their own depravity to the rest of mankind, and believe that others are as little shocked with their crimes as they are themselves.

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selves. Richard having trampled upon every sentiment of justice, had no conception of the general abhorrence that had arisen against him. He thought resentment might belong to the sufferers, and their immediate adherents; but, having no faith in the existence of a disinterested sense of virtue, he appears to have felt no apprehension lest other persons should be offended with his injustice, or inclined to punish his inhuman guilt. Add to this, that success administers to his boldness; and that he is daily more and more inured to the practice of violent outrage. Before he obtained the diadem, he proceeded with caution; he endeavoured to impose upon mankind the belief of his sanctified manners; he treated his associates with suitable deference; and seemed as dexterous in his conduct, as he was barbarous in disposition. But caution and dissimulation required an effort; the exertion was laborious; and to be suspended

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 39

suspended when no longer needful. Thus rendered familiar with perfidious cruelty; flushed with success; more elate with confidence in his own ability, than attentive to the suggestions of his suspicion; and from his incapacity of feeling moral obligation, more ignorant of the general abhorrence he had incurred, than averse to revenge; as he becomes, if possible, more inhuman, he certainly becomes more incautious. This appears in the wanton display of his real character, and of those vices which drew upon him even the curses of a parent.

DUTCH. Either thou'lt die by God's just ordinance,
Ere from this war thou turn a conqueror;
Or I with grief and extreme age shall perish,
And never look upon thy face again:
Therefore, take with thee my most heavy curse,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st.

His incautious behaviour after he has arisen to supreme authority, appears very

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striking in his conduct to his accomplices. Those whom he formerly seduced, or deceived, or flattered, he treats with indifference or disrespect. He conceives himself no longer in need of their aid : he has no occasion, as he apprehends, to assume disguise. Men of high rank, who shall seem to give him advice or assistance, and so by their influence with the multitude, reconcile them to his crimes, or bear a part of his infamy, cease to be reckoned necessary ; and he has employment for none, but the desperate assassin, or implicit menial. All this is illustrated in his treatment of Buckingham. Blinded by his own barbarity, he requires his assistance in the death of his nephews. Buckingham, having less incitement than formerly to give him countenance in his guilt, hesitates, and seems to refuse. Richard is offended ; does not govern his temper as on former occasions ; expresses his displeasure ; refuses to ratify the promises he had

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 41

had given him; behaves to him, in the refusal, with supercilious insult, and thus provokes his resentment.

BUCK. My Lord, I claim the gift, my due by promise,

For which your honour and your faith are pawn'd;
Th' Earldom of Hereford, and the moveables,
Which you have promised I shall possess, &c.

RICH. Thou troublest me; I am not in the vein.

[Exit.

BUCK. Is it even so?—Repays he my deep service
With such contempt?—Made I him king for this?
O, let me think on Hastings, and be gone
To Brecknock, while my fearful head is on.

Thus the conduct of Richard involves him in danger. The minds of men are alienated from his interests. Those of his former associates, who were in public esteem, are dismissed with indignity, and incensed to resentment. Even such of his adherents as are interested in his fortunes, on their own account, regard him with utter aversion. A stroke aimed at him in this perilous situation, must prove

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effectual. He arrives at the brink of ruin, and the slightest impulse will push him down. He resembles the misshapen rock described in a fairy tale. "This astonishing rock," says the whimsical novelist, "was endowed, by infernal sorcery, with the power of impetuous motion. It rolled through a flourishing kingdom; it crushed down its opponents; it laid the land desolate; and was followed by a stream of blood. It arrived unwittingly at an awful precipice; it had no power of returning; for the bloody stream that pursued it was so strong, that it never rolled back. It was pushed from the precipice; was shivered into fragments; and the roar of its downfall arose unto heaven."

The pleasure we receive from the ruin of Richard, though intimately connected with that arising from the various displays of his character, is, nevertheless, different.

rent. We are not amazed, as formerly, with his talents and his address: but shocked at his cruelty, our abhorrence is softened, or converted into an agreeable feeling, by the satisfaction we receive from his punishment. Besides, it is a punishment inflicted, not by the agency of an external cause, but incurred by the natural progress of his vices. We are more gratified in seeing him racked with suspicion before the battle of Bosworth; listening from tent to tent, lest his soldiers should meditate treason; overwhelmed on the eve of the battle with presages of calamity, arising from inauspicious remembrance; and driven, by the dread of danger, to contemplate and be shocked at his own heinous transgressions: we are more affected, and more gratified with these, than with the death he so deservedly suffers. Richard and his conscience had long been strangers. That importunate monitor had been dismissed, at a very early

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early period, from his service; nor had given him the least interruption in the career of his vices. Yet they were not entirely parted. Conscience was to visit him before he died, and chose for the hour of her visitation, the eve of his death. She comes introduced by Danger; spreads before him, in hues of infernal impresson, the picture of his enormities; shakes him with deep dismay; pierces his soul with a poisoned arrow; unnerves and forsakes him.

O coward Conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
The light burns blue—is it not dead midnight?
Cold, fearful drops, stand on my trembling flesh:
What! do I fear myself? There's none else by.—
Is there a murd'rer here? No:—Yes—I am.
My Conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And ev'ry tongue brings in a several tale,
And ev'ry tale condemns me for a villain.

Upon the whole, certain objects, whether they actually operate on our senses, or be presented to the mind by imitation, are

are disagreeable. Yet many disagreeable objects may be so imitated, by having their deformities veiled, or by having any agreeable qualities they may possess, improved or brought forward, in such a manner, that, so far from continuing offensive, they afford us pleasure. Many actions of mankind are in their own nature horrible and disgusting. Mere deceit, mere grovelling appetite, cruelty and meanness, both in the imitation and the original, occasion pain and aversion. Yet these vices may be so represented by the skill of an ingenious artist, as to afford us pleasure. The most usual method of rendering their representation agreeable is, by setting the characters in whom they predominate, in opposition to such characters as are eminent for their opposite virtues. The dissimulation, ingratitude, and inhumanity of Goneril, set in opposition to the native simplicity, the filial affection, and sensibility of Cordelia, though
in

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in themselves hateful, become an interesting spectacle. The pleasure we receive is, by having the agreeable feelings and sentiments that virtue excites, improved and rendered exquisite by contrast, by alternate hopes and fears, and even by our subdued and coinciding abhorrence of vice. For the painful feeling, overcome by delightful emotions, loses its direction and peculiar character; but retaining its force, communicates additional energy to the prevailing sensation, and so augments its efficacy. Another more difficult, though no less interesting method of producing the same effect is, when, with scarce any attention to opposite virtues in other persons, very aggravated and heinous vices are blended and united in the same person, with agreeable intellectual qualities. Boldness, command of temper, a spirit of enterprise, united with the intellectual endowments of discernment, penetration, dexterity, and address,

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 47

address, give us pleasure. Yet these may be employed as instruments of cruelty and oppression, no less than of justice and humanity. When the representation is such, that the pleasure arising from these qualities is stronger than the painful aversion and abhorrence excited by concomitant vices, the general effect is agreeable. Even the painful emotion, as in the former case, losing its character, but retaining its vigour, imparts additional force to our agreeable feelings. Thus, though there is no approbation of the vicious character, we are, nevertheless, pleased with the representation. The soul is overshadowed with an agreeable gloom, and her powers are suspended with delightful horror. The pleasure is varied and increased, when the criminal propensities, gaining strength by indulgence, occasion the neglect of intellectual endowments, and disregard of their assistance; so that by natural consequence, and without the interposition

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interposition of uncommon agency from without, the vicious person, becoming as incautious as he is wicked, is rendered the prey of his own corruptions; fosters those snakes in his bosom that shall devour his vitals; and suffers the most condign of all punishment, the miseries intailed by guilt.

Shakespeare, in his Richard the Third, has chosen that his principal character should be constructed according to the last of these methods; and this I have endeavoured to illustrate, by considering the manner in which Richard is affected by the consciousness of his own deformity; by considering the dexterity of his conduct in seducing the Lady Anne; by observing his various deportment towards his seeming friends or accomplices; and finally, by tracing the progress of his vices to his downfall and utter ruin.

The other excellencies of this tragedy, besides the character of Richard, are, indeed,

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 49

deed, of an inferior nature, but not unworthy of Shakespeare. The characters of Buckingham, Anne, Hastings, and Queen Margaret, are executed with lively colouring and striking features; but, excepting Margaret, they are exhibited indirectly; and are more fully known by the conduct of Richard towards them, than by their own demeanour. They give the sketch and outlines in their own actions; but the picture appears finished in the deportment of Richard. This, however, of itself, is a proof of very singular skill. The conduct of the story is not inferior to that in Shakespeare's other historical tragedies. It exhibits a natural progress of events, terminated by one interesting and complete catastrophe. Many of the episodes have uncommon excellence. Of this kind are, in general, all the speeches of Margaret. Their effect is awful; they coincide with the style of the tragedy; and by wearing the same gloomy

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gloomy complexion, her prophecies and imprecations suit and increase its horror. There was never in any poem a dream superior to that of Clarence. It pleases, like the prophecies of Margaret, by a solemn anticipation of future events, and by its consonance with the general tone of the tragedy. It pleases, by being so simple, so natural, and so pathetic, that every reader seems to have felt the same or similar horrors; and is inclined to say with Brakenbury,

No wonder, Lord, that it affrighted you;
I am afraid, methinks, to hear you tell it.

This tragedy, however, like every work of Shakespeare, has many faults; and in particular, it seems to have been too hastily written. Some incidents are introduced without any apparent reason, or without apparent necessity in the conduct of the performance. We are not, for instance, sufficiently informed of the motive that

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that prompted Richard to marry the widow of Prince Edward. In other respects, as was observed, this scene possesses very singular merit. The scene towards the close of the tragedy, between the Queen and Richard, when he solicits her consent to marry her daughter Elizabeth, seems no other than a copy of that now mentioned. As such, it is faulty; and still more so, by being executed with less ability. Yet this incident is not liable to the objection made to the former. We see a good, prudential reason, for the marriage of Richard with Elizabeth; but none for his marriage with Lady Anne. We almost wish that the first courtship had been omitted, and that the dialogue between Richard and Anne had been suited and appropriated to Richard and the Queen. Neither are we sufficiently informed of the motives, that, on some occasions, influenced the conduct of Buckingham. We are not enough pre-

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pared for his animosity against the Queen and her kindred ; nor can we pronounce, without hazarding conjecture, that it proceeded from envy of their sudden greatness, or from having his vanity flattered by the seeming deference of Richard. Yet these motives seem highly probable. The young Princes bear too great a share in the drama. It would seem the poet intended to interest us very much in their misfortunes. The representation, however, is not agreeable. The Princes have more smartness than simplicity ; and we are more affected with Tyrrel's description of their death, than pleased with any thing in their own conversation. Nor does the scene of the ghosts, in the last act, seem equal in execution to the design of Shakespeare. There is more delightful horror in the speech of Richard awakening from his dream, than in any of the predictions denounced against him. There seems, indeed, some impropriety in
repre-

OF RICHARD THE THIRD. 53

representing those spectres as actually appearing, which were only seen in a vision. Besides, Richard might have described them in the succeeding scene, to Ratcliff, so as to have produced, at least in the perusal of the work, a much stronger effect. The representation of ghosts in this passage, is by no means so affecting, nor so awful, as the dream related by Clarence. Lastly, there is in this performance, too much deviation in the dialogue from the dignity of the buskin; and deviations still more blameable, from the language of decent manners. Yet, with these imperfections, this tragedy is a striking monument of human genius; and the success of the poet, in delineating the character of Richard, has been as great as the singular boldness of the design.

NOT RECORDED IN THE

The first of these is the fact that the
 government has been unable to raise
 the necessary funds to meet its
 obligations. This is due to a
 number of factors, including the
 fact that the government has been
 unable to collect the necessary
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ESSAY II.

ON THE DRAMATIC CHARACTER OF KING LEAR.

DISINTERESTED principles are of different kinds: of consequence, the actions that flow from them are more or less beneficial, and more or less entitled to praise. We are moved by inconsiderate impulse to the performance of beneficent actions; as we are moved by inconsiderate impulse to the perpetration of guilt. You see an unhappy person; you discern the visitation of grief in his features; you hear it in the plaintive tones of voice; you are

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warmed with sudden and resistless emotion; you never enquire concerning the propriety of your feelings, or the merits of the sufferer; and you hasten to relieve him. Your conduct proceeds from inconsiderate impulse. It entitles you to the praise of sensibility, but not of reflection.

You are again in the same situation; but the symptoms of distress do not produce in you the same ardent effects: you are moved with no violent agitation, and you feel little sympathy; but you perceive distress; you are convinced that the sufferer suffers unjustly; you know you are bound to relieve him; and in consequence of these convictions, you offer him relief. Your conduct proceeds from sense of duty; and though it entitles you to the credit of rational humanity, it does not entitle you, in this instance, to the praise of fine sensibility.

Those who perform beneficent actions, from immediate feeling or impetuous impulse,

pulse, have a great deal of pleasure.— Their conduct, too, by the influence of sympathetic affection, imparts pleasure to the beholder. The joy felt both by the agent and the beholder is ardent, and approaches to rapture. There is also an energy in the principle, which produces great and uncommon exertions; yet both the principle of action, and the pleasure it produces, are shifting. “Beauteous as the morning cloud or the early dew;” like them, too, they pass away. The pleasure arising from knowledge of duty is less impetuous: it has no approaches to rapture; it seldom makes the heart throb, or the tear descend; and as it produces no transporting enjoyment, it seldom leads to uncommon exertion; but the joy it affords is uniform, steady, and lasting. As the conduct is most perfect, so our happiness is most complete, when both principles are united: when our convictions of duty are animated with sensibility;

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and sensibility guided by convictions of duty.

It is, indeed, to be regretted, that feeling and the knowledge of duty are not always united. It is deeply to be regretted, that unless sensibility be regulated by that knowledge of duty which arises from reflection on our own condition, and acquaintance with human nature, it may produce unhappiness both to ourselves and others; but chiefly to ourselves. To illustrate these consequences may be of service. It is often no less important to point out the nature and evil effects of seeming excellence, than of acknowledged depravity; besides, it will exhibit the human mind in a striking situation.

The subject, perhaps, is unpopular.—It is the fashion of the times to celebrate feeling; and the conduct flowing from sedate principles is pronounced cold or ungenial. It is the conduct, we are told, of those dispassionate minds who never deviate

deviate to the right hand or the left; who travel through life unnoticed: and as they are never visited by the extacies of sensibility, they enjoy unenvied immunity from its delicate sorrows. What pretensions have they to the distinction of weak nerves or exquisite feeling? They know so little of the melancholy and of the refined impatience, so often the portion of sentimental spirits, that they are absurd enough to term them chagrin and ill-humour. In truth, sentiment and sensibility have been the subject of so many tales and sermons, that the writer who would propose the union of feeling with reflection, may, perhaps, incur much fastidious disdain: we shall, therefore, go forth upon this adventure under the banner of a powerful and respectable leader. Shakespeare was no less intimately acquainted with the principles of human conduct, than excellent in delineation; and has exhibited in his Dramatic Character of King Lear the man of mere sensibility.

I. Those

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I. Those who are guided in their conduct by impetuous impulse, arising from sensibility, and undirected by reflection, are liable to extravagant or outrageous excess. Transported by their own emotions, they misapprehend the condition of others: they are prone to exaggeration; and even the good actions they perform, excite amazement rather than approbation. Lear, an utter stranger to adverse fortune, and under the power of excessive affection, conceived his children in every respect deserving. During this ardent and inconsiderate mood, he ascribed to them such corresponding sentiments as justified his extravagant fondness. He saw his children as the gentlest and most affectionate of the human race. What condescension, on his part, could be a suitable reward for their filial piety? He divides his kingdom among them; they will relieve him from the cares of royalty; and to his old age will afford consolation.

He

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He shakes all cares and business from his age,
Conferring them on younger strengths.

But he is not only extravagant in his love; he is no less outrageous in his displeasure. Kent, moved with zeal for his interest, remonstrates, with the freedom of conscious integrity, against his conduct to Cordelia; and Lear, impatient of good counsel, not only rebukes him with unbecoming asperity, but inflicts unmerited punishment.

Five days we do allot thee for provision,
To shield thee from disasters of the world;
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom: if on the tenth day following
Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death.

II. The conduct proceeding from unguided feeling will be *capricious*. In minds where principles of regular and permanent influence have no authority, every feeling has a right to command; and every impulse, how sudden soever, is regarded, during

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during the season of its power, with entire approbation.

All such feelings and impulses are not only admitted, but obeyed; and lead us, without hesitation or reflection, to a corresponding deportment. But the objects with which we are conversant, often vary their aspects, and are seen by us in different attitudes. This may be owing to accidental connection or comparison with other things, of a similar or of a different nature; or it may be owing, and this is most frequently the case, to some accidental mood or humour of our own. A fine landscape, viewed in different lights, shall appear more or less beautiful; yet the landscape in itself shall remain unaltered; nor will the person who views it pronounce it in reality less beautiful than it was, though he sees it with a setting rather than with a rising sun. The capricious inconstancy of their character is very apt to display itself, when unfortunately

nately they form expectations, and sustain disappointments. Moved by an ardent mood; they regard the objects of their affection with extravagant transport; they transfer to them their own dispositions; they make no allowance for differences of condition or state of mind; and expect returns suitable to their own unreasonable ardours. They are disappointed; they feel pain: in proportion to the violence of the disappointed passion, is the pang of repulse. This rouses a sense of wrong, and excites their resentment. The new feelings operate with as much force as the former. No enquiry is made concerning the reasonableness of the conduct they would produce. Resentment and indignation are felt; and merely because they are felt, they are deemed just and becoming.

Cordelia was the favourite daughter of Lear. Her sisters had replied to him, with an extravagance suited to the extravagance

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travagance of his affection. He expected much more from Cordelia. Yet her reply was better suited to the relation that subsisted between them, than to the fondness of his present humour. He is disappointed, pained, and provoked. There is no gentle advocate in his bosom to mitigate the rigours of his displeasure. He follows the blind impulse of his resentment; abuses and abandons Cordelia.

Let it be so; thy truth then be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood;
And, as a stranger to my heart and me,
Hold thee from this for ever.

Unhappy are they who have established no system concerning the character of their friends; and who have ascertained, by the aid of reason or observation, no measure of their virtues or infirmities. There is no affectionate inmate in their bosoms, the vicegerent of indulgent affection,

fection, to plead in your behalf, if from inadvertency, or the influence of a wayward, but transient mood, affecting either you or themselves, you act differently from your wonted conduct, or differently from their expectations. Thus their appearances are as variable as that of the cameliion: they now shine with the fairest colours; and in an instant they are changed into sable. In vain would you ask for a reason. You may enquire of the winds; or question their morning dreams. Yet they are ardent in protestations; they give assurances of lasting attachment; but they are not to be trusted. Not that they intend to deceive you. They have no such intention. They are vessels without rudder or anchor, driven by every blast that blows. Their assurances are the colours impressed by a sun-beam on the breast of a watery cloud: they are formed into a beautiful figure; they shine for a moment with every exquisite tint;

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tint ; in a moment they vanish, and leave nothing but a drizzly shower in their stead.

III. Those who are guided by inconsiderate feeling, will often appear variable in their conduct, and of course irresolute. There is no variety of feeling to which persons of great sensibility are more liable, than that of great elevation or depression of spirits. The sudden and unaccountable transitions from the one to the other, are not less striking, than the vast difference of which we are conscious in the one mood or in the other. In an elevated state of spirits, we form projects, entertain hopes, conceive ourselves capable of high exertion, think highly of ourselves, and in this hour of transport, undervalue obstacles or opposition. In a moment of depression, the scene is altered: the sky lowers; nature ceases to smile; or if she smiles, it is not to us; we feel ourselves feeble, forsaken, and
hopeless;

OF KING LEAR. 67

hopeless; all things, human and divine, have conspired against us. Having no adequate opinion of ourselves, or no just apprehension of the state of opinions concerning us, we think that no great exertion or display of merit is expected from us, and of course we grow indifferent about our conduct. Thus the mind, at one instant, aspires to heaven, is bold, enterprising, disdainful, and supercilious: the wind changes—we are baffled or fatigued; and the spirit formerly so full of ardour, becomes humble and passive.

Lear had suffered insult and ingratitude from his eldest daughter. He boils with resentment; he expresses it with imprecations, and leaves her: but his mind, harassed and teased, suffers sore agitation, and is enfeebled. He looks of course for relief; indulges confidence in his second daughter; from her he expects consolation; anticipates a kindly reception; yields to that depression of mind, which

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is connected with the wish and expectation of pity; he longs to complain; and to mingle his tears with the sympathetic sorrows of Regan. Thus entirely reduced, he discerns, even in Regan, symptoms of disaffection. Yet, in his present state, he will not believe them. They are forced upon his observation; and Kent, who was exiled for wishing to moderate his wrath against Cordelia, is obliged to stimulate his displeasure at Regan. Yet, in the weakness of his present depression, and longings for affectionate pity, he would repose on her tenderness, and addresses her with full confidence in her love:

No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse.

————— 'Tis not in thee.

To bandy hasty words, to scant my fizes, &c.

————— Thou better know'st

The offices of nature.

In the whole intercourse between Lear and Regan, we see a contest between
Lear's

OF KING LEAR. 69

Lear's indignant and resentful emotions, excited by the indications of Regan's disaffection, and those fond expectations and desires of sympathetic tenderness, which proceed from, and in their turn contribute to, depression of spirit. Thus he condescends to entreat and remonstrate :

I gave you all !

At length, repulsed and insulted by Regan, totally cast down and enfeebled, he forgets his determined hatred of Goneril ; and in the misery of his depression, irresolute and inconsistent, he addresses her as his last resource :

—————Not being the worst,
Stands in some need of praise ; I'll go with thee ;
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou hast twice her love.

Here he is again disappointed. He has
no other resource. His mind, originally of

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a keen and impetuous nature, is now unoccupied by any tender sentiment. Accordingly, at the close of this interesting scene, we see him forcing himself, as it were, from his depression, and expressing his undiminished resentment :

You Heavens, give me that patience which I need;
 You see me here, you Gods, a poor old man,
 As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
 If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
 Against their father, fool me not so much
 To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger:
 O let not womens' weapons, water-drops,
 Stain my man's cheeks: no, you unnatural hags,
 I will have such revenges on you both,
 That all the world shall—I will do such things—
 What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be,
 The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep—
 No, I'll not weep.
 I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
 Shall break into an hundred thousand flaws,
 Or e'er I'll weep—O Fool, I shall go mad.

Inconsistency of conduct, and of consequence, irresolution, occasioned by irregular and undirected feelings, proceed
 from

from other states of mind than depression of spirits. Of this, some examples different from the present now occur to me. They illustrate the general position, and may therefore be mentioned.

Lorenzo de Medicis * had a lively fancy; he was a courtier—ambitious—and had his imagination filled with ideas of pageantry. He wished to enjoy pre-eminence; but his brother Alexander, the reigning Prince, was an obstacle to be removed; and this could only be done by spoiling him of his life. The difficulty no doubt was great; yet, it figured less to his heated imagination, than the dignity and enjoyment he had in view. Elegant in his manners; accomplished with every pleasing endowment; of soft and insinuating address; he had, nevertheless, no secret counsellor in his breast to plead in behalf of justice. Thus

E 3 prompted,

* See Robertson's History of the Reign of Charles V.

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prompted, and thus unguarded, he perpetrates the death of his brother. He sees his blood streaming; hears him groaning in the agonies of death; beholds him convulsed in the pangs of departing life: a new set of feelings arise; the delicate, accomplished courtier, who could meditate atrocious injury, cannot, without being astonished, witness the bloody object; he remains motionless; irresolute; appalled at the deed; and in this state of amazement, neither prosecutes his design, nor thinks of escaping. Thus, without struggle or opposition, he is seized and punished as he deserves.

Voltaire gives a similar account of his hero, Lewis. After describing in lively colours the desolation perpetrated by his authority in the Palatinate; the conflagration of cities, and the utter ruin of the inhabitants, he subjoins, that these orders were issued from Versailles, from the midst of pleasures; and that, on a nearer view,

the calamities he thus occasioned would have filled him with horror. That is, Lewis, like all men of irregular sensibility, was governed by the influences of objects operating immediately on his senses; and so according to such accidental mood as depended on present images, he was humane or inhuman. Lewis and Lorenzo, in those instances, were men of feeling; but not of virtue. They were a-kin to Lady Macbeth, who advised and determined the murder of Duncan, and who would have executed the deed herself; but with the dagger lifted, in act to strike, of such sensibility, so tender, she could not proceed—the old man resembled her father.

IV. The man of ungoverned sensibility, is in danger of becoming morose or inhuman. He entertains sanguine hopes; he allows every feeling to reign in his breast uncontrouled; his judgment is dazzled; and his imagination riots in rapturous dreams of enjoyment. Every

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object of his wishes is arrayed in seducing colours, and brought immediately within his reach. He engages in the pursuit; encounters difficulties of which he was not aware; his ravishing expectations subside; he had made no provision for arduous adventure; his imagination becomes a traitor; the dangers and difficulties appear more formidable than they really are; and he abandons his undertaking. His temper is of consequence altered. No longer elated with hope, he becomes the prey of chagrin, of envy, or of resentment. Even suppose him successful; his enjoyments are not equal to his hopes. His desires were excessive, and no gratification whatever can allay the vehemence of their ardour. He is discontented, restless, and unhappy. In a word, irregular feelings, and great sensibility, produce extravagant desires; these lead to disappointment; and in minds that are undisciplined, disappointment begets

gets moroseness and anger. These dispositions again will display themselves, according to the condition or character of him who feels them. Men of feeble constitutions, and without power over the fortunes of other men, under such malign influences, become fretful, invidious, and misanthropical. Persons of firmer structure, and unfortunately possessed of power, under such direction, become inhuman. Herod was a man of feeling. Witness his conduct to Mariamne. At one time elegant, courteous, and full of tenderness; his fondness was as unbounded, as the virtues and graces of Mariamne were peerless. At other times, offended because her expressions of mutual affection were not as extravagant as the extravagance of his own emotions, he became suspicious without cause. Thus affectionate, fond, suspicious, resentful, and powerful; in the phrenzy of irregular feeling, he put to death Mariamne.

Lear,

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Lear, in the representation of Shakespeare, possessing great sensibility, and full of affection, seeks a kind of enjoyment suited to his temper. Ascribing the same sensibility and affection to his daughters, for they must have it, no doubt, by hereditary right, he forms a pleasing dream of reposing his old age under the wings of their kindly protection. He is disappointed; he feels extreme pain and resentment; he vents his resentment; but he has no power. Will he then become morose and retired? His habits and temper will not give him leave. Impetuous, and accustomed to authority, consequently of an unyielding nature, he would wreak his wrath, if he were able, in deeds of excessive violence. He would do, he knows not what. He who could pronounce such imprecations against Goneril, as, notwithstanding her guilt, appear shocking and horrid, would, in the moment of his resentment, have
put

put her to death. If, without any ground of offence, he could abandon Cordelia, and cast off his favourite child, what would he not have done to the unnatural and pitiless Regan?

Here, then, we have a curious spectacle: a man accustomed to bear rule, suffering fore disappointment, and grievous wrongs; high minded, impetuous, susceptible of extreme resentment; and incapable of yielding to morose silence, or malignant retirement. What change can befall his spirit? For his condition is so altered, that his spirit also must suffer change. What! but to have his understanding torn up by the hurricane of passion, to scorn consolation, and lose his reason! Shakespeare could not avoid making Lear distracted. Other poets exhibit madness, because they chuse it, or for the sake of variety, or to deepen the distress: but Shakespeare has exhibited the madness of Lear, as the natural effect of such suffering on such a character. It was

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was an event in the progress of Lear's mind, driven by such feelings, desires, and passions as the poet ascribes to him, as could not be avoided.

It is sometimes observed, that there are three kinds of madness displayed in this performance: that of Lear, that of Edgar; and that of the Fool. The observation is inaccurate. The madness of Edgar is entirely pretended; and that of the Fool has also more affectation than reality. Accordingly, we find Lear for ever dwelling upon one idea, and reconciling every thing to one appearance. The storms and tempests were not his daughters. The gleams of reason that shoot athwart the darkness of his disorder, render the gloom more horrid. Edgar affects to dwell upon one idea; he is haunted by fiends; but he is not uniform. The feeling he discovers, and compassion for the distresses of Lear, breaking out in spite of his counterfeit, render his

speeches very often pathetic. The Fool, who has more honesty than understanding, and more understanding than he pretends, becomes an interesting character, by his attachment to his unfortunate master.

V. Lear, thus extravagant, inconsistent, inconstant, capricious, variable, irresolute, and impetuously vindictive, is almost an object of disapprobation. But our poet, with his usual skill, blends the disagreeable qualities with such circumstances as correct this effect, and form one delightful assemblage. Lear, in his good intentions, was without deceit; his violence is not the effect of premeditated malignity; his weaknesses are not crimes, but often the effects of misruled affections. This is not all: he is an old man; an old king; an aged father; and the instruments of his suffering are undutiful children. He is justly entitled to our compassion; and the incidents last mentioned, though they imply no merit, they procure

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procure some respect. Add to all this, that he becomes more and more interesting towards the close of the drama; not merely because he is more and more unhappy, but because he becomes really more deserving of our esteem. His misfortunes correct his misconduct; they rouse reflection, and lead him to that reformation which we approve. We see the commencement of this reformation, after he has been dismissed by Goneril, and meets with symptoms of disaffection in Regan. He who abandoned Cordelia with impetuous outrage, and banished Kent for offering an apology in her behalf; seeing his servant grossly maltreated, and his own arrival unwelcomed, has already sustained some chastisement: he does not express that ungoverned violence which his preceding conduct might lead us to expect. He restrains his emotion in its first ebullition, and reasons

con-

OF KING LEAR. 81

concerning the probable causes of what seemed so inauspicious.

LEAR. The King would speak with Cornwall; the
dear father

Would with his daughter speak, commands her service:
Are they inform'd of this?—My breath and blood!—
Fiery—the fiery Duke? Tell the hot Duke that—
No—but not yet—may be he is not well—
Infirmity doth still neglect all office,
Whereto our health is bound: we're not ourselves
When nature, being oppress'd, commands the mind
To suffer with the body—I'll forbear;
And am fallen out with my more heady will,
To take the indisposed and sickly fit,
For the sound man.

As his misfortunes increase, we find him still more inclined to reflect on his situation. He does not, indeed, express blame of himself; yet he expresses no sentiment whatever of overbearing conceit. He seems rational and modest; and the application to himself is extremely pathetic:

—————Close pent up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and ask

These

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These dreadful summoners grace.—I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

Soon after, we find him actually pronouncing censure upon himself. Hitherto he had been the mere creature of sensibility; he now begins to reflect; and grieves that he had not done so before.

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm!
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
From seasons such as these?—O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
And shew the heavens more just.

At last, he is in a state of perfect contrition, and expresses less resentment against Goneril and Regan, than self-condemnation for his treatment of Cordelia, and a perfect, but not extravagant sense of her affection.

KENT. The poor distressed Lear's in town,
Who sometimes in his better tune remembers
What

OF KING LEAR. 83

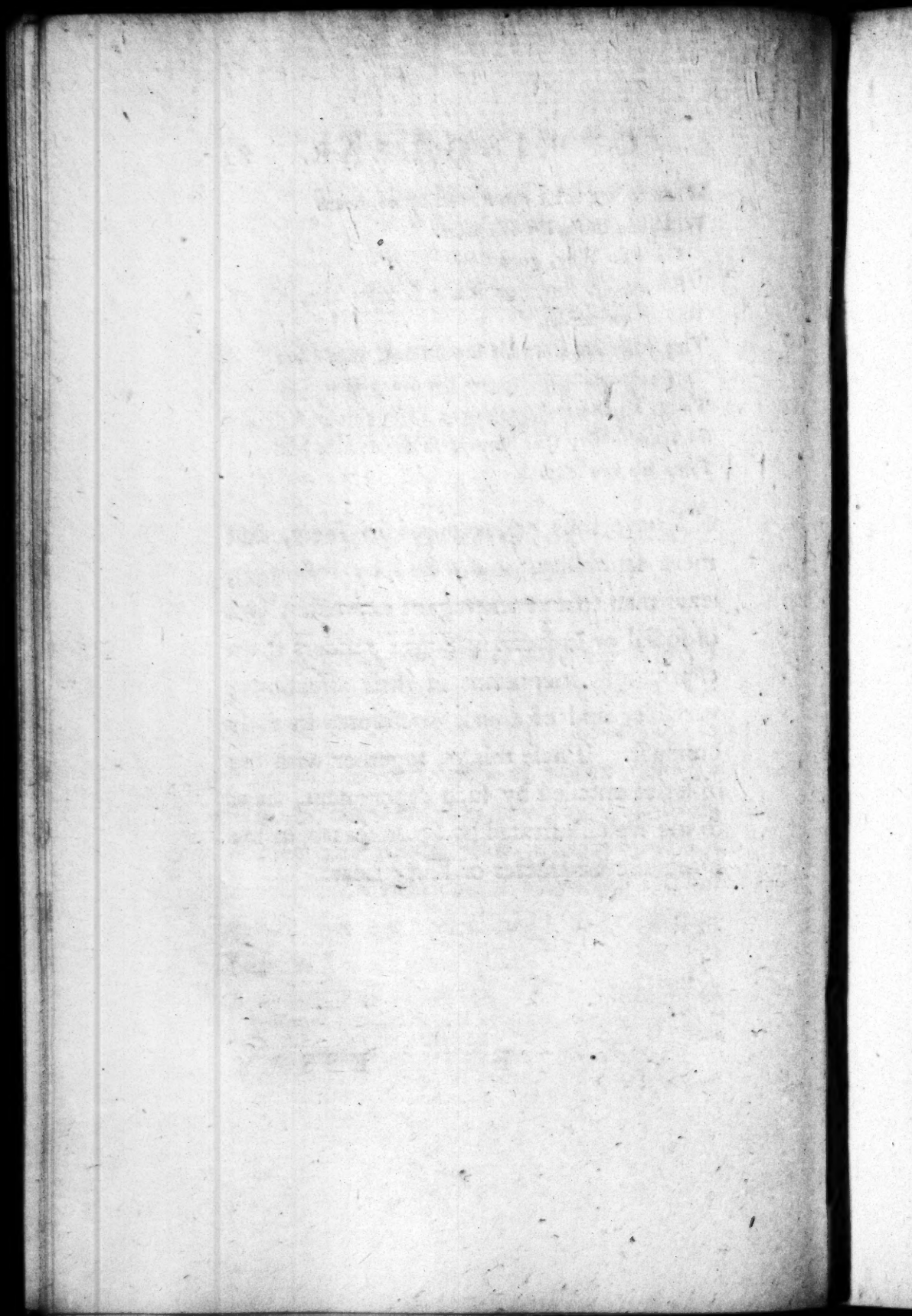
What we are come about, and by no means
Will yield to see his daughter.

GENT. Why, good Sir?

KENT. A sovereign shame so bows him, his un-
kindness,

That stript her from his benediction, turn'd her
To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughter: these things sting him
So venomously, that burning shame detains him
From his Cordelia.

I have thus endeavoured to shew, that mere sensibility, undirected by reflection, leads men to an extravagant expression both of social or unsocial feelings; renders them capriciously inconstant in their affections; variable, and of course irresolute, in their conduct. These things, together with the miseries entailed by such deportment, seem to me well illustrated by Shakespeare, in his Dramatic Character of King Lear.



ESSAY III.

ON THE DRAMATIC CHARACTER OF TIMON OF ATHENS.

SHAKESPEARE, in his *Timon of Athens*, illustrates the consequences of that inconsiderate profusion which has the appearance of liberality, and is supposed even by the inconsiderate person himself to proceed from a generous principle; but which, in reality, has its chief origin in the love of distinction. Though this is not the view usually entertained of this singular dramatic character, I persuade myself, if we attend to the design of the

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poet in all its parts, we shall find, that the opinion now³ advanced is not without foundation.

The love of distinction is asserted to be the ruling principle in the conduct of Timon; yet it is not affirmed, nor is it necessary to affirm, that Timon has no goodness of heart. He has much goodness, gentleness, and love of society.— These are not inconsistent with the love of distinction: they often reside together; and in particular, that love of distinction which reigned in the conduct of Timon, may easily be shewn to have received its particular bias and direction from original goodness. For, without this, what could have determined him to chuse one method of making himself conspicuous rather than another? Why did he not seek the distinction conferred by the display of a military or of a political character? Or why did he not aspire after pageantry and parade, the pomp of public buildings, and

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 87

the ostentation of wealth, unconnected with any kind of beneficence?

In general, our love of fame or distinction is directed and influenced by some previous cast of temper, or early tendency of disposition. Moved by powers and dispositions leading us to one kind of exertion rather than another, we attribute superior excellence to such exertion. We transfer the same sentiment to the rest of mankind. We fancy, that no pre-eminence can be attained but by such talents as we possess; and it requires an effort of cool reflection, before we can allow that there may be excellence in those things which we cannot relish, or merit in that conduct to which we are not inclined. Guided by early or inherent predilection, men actuated by the love of distinction, seek the idol of their desires in various situations; in the bustle of active life, or in the shade of retirement. Take the following examples. The son of Olorus

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was present, while yet a boy, at the Olympic games. All Greece was assembled; many feats of dexterity, no doubt, were exhibited; and every honour that assembled Greece could bestow, was conferred on the victors. Moved by a spectacle so interesting and so inspiring, the Spartan, Theban, or Athenian youth, who were not yet of vigour sufficient to strive for the wreath, longed, we may readily suppose, for maturer years; and became, in their ardent imaginations, skilful wrestlers and charioteers. The son of Olorus, if we may judge by the consequence, felt little emotion; no sympathetic longings; and no impatience to drive a chariot.— But hearing Herodotus, on that occasion, reciting his history, he felt other sensations; his heart throbbed, and the tears descended. The venerable historian observed him weeping, and comprehending his character, “I give thee joy,” said he to his father, “for the happy genius of
“ thy

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 89

“thy son.” Now, the son of Olorus became an historian no less renowned than Herodotus: for Herodotus and Thucydides are usually named together. The celebrated Turenne, in his early days, was an admirer, no less passionate, of Quintus Curtius, than the son of Olorus was of Herodotus; and we are told by Ramsay, from D’Ablancourt, that when not yet twelve years of age, he challenged an officer who called his favourite history a romance. But this admiration was not so much for the graces of flowery composition which abound in the Roman historian, as for the valiant actions of Alexander. These drew his attention, and soon after, his imitation. Though his breast heaved, and his eyes sparkled, in the perusal of favourite passages, he was not led to write fine descriptions like Curtius; but to break horses like the son of Philip.

Now, since those that are actuated by the love of distinction, are led, by early

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or inherent predilection, to one kind of action rather than another, we have no difficulty in allowing principles of goodness and humanity to have reigned early, or originally, in the breast of Timon. Nay, after losing their authority, they continued for some time to attend him; and resided in that breast where they formerly reigned. They became like those eastern princes, or those early sovereigns of a neighbouring country, who grew so indolent and passive, that they lay immured in their apartments, and left the management of the state to some active minister, an ambitious vizier, or mayor of the palace. Some of these ministers acted for a while under the banner of the sovereign's authority; but afterwards, having left him but the shadow of power, they promoted themselves; became supreme and despotic.

Here, however, we are led to enquire, how happens it that a principle inherent in the soul, and once an active principle, becomes

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 91

becomes passive, suffers others to operate in its stead; not only so, but to perform similar functions, assume corresponding appearances, and, in general, to be guided apparently to the same tenor of conduct? Did the energy of the inherent affection suffer abatement by frequent exercise? Or were there no kindred principles in the soul to support and confirm its authority? Could not reason, or the sense of duty, support, and the power of active habit confirm? How came the sultan to submit to the vizier?

In general, original principles and feelings become passive, if they are not, in their first operation, confirmed by reason and convictions of duty; and if the passion which springs up in their place assumes their appearance, and acts apparently as they would have done. Nothing is more imposing than this species of usurpation. It is not the open assault of a foe, but the guile of pretended friendship. No-
thing

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thing contributes more to dangerous self-deception. Applying this remark to our present subject, and following the lights of observation, we shall briefly illustrate, how early or inherent goodness may be subverted by the love of distinction. A person of good dispositions, inclined by his temper and constitution to perform acts of beneficence, receives pleasure in the performance. He also receives applauses. He has done good, and is told of it. Thus he receives pleasure, not only from having gratified a native impulse, but from the praise of mankind, and the gratitude of those whom he may have served. The applauses he receives are more liberally bestowed by designing and undeserving persons, than by the deserving and undesigning. The deserving depend too much on the permanency of the original principle, independent of encouragement; and may therefore be too sparing in their approbation. Gustavus Adolphus

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 93

Adolphus used to say, that valour needed encouragement; and was therefore unreserved in his praises. The same may be said of every virtue. But designing, or undeserving persons, transferring their own dispositions to other men, and of course apprehensive lest the wheels and springs of benevolence should contract rust, are oiling them for ever with profuse adulation. Mean time, our man of liberality begins to be moved by other principles than fine feelings and constitutional impulse. The pleasure arising from such actions as these produce, is too fine and too delicate, compared with the joys conferred by loud and continued applauses. Thus his taste becomes vitiated; he not only acquires an undue relish for adulation, but is uneasy without it; he contracts a false appetite; and solicits distinction, not so much for the pleasure it yields him, as to remove a disagreeable craving. Thus, such benevolent

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volent actions as formerly proceeded from constitutional goodness, have now their origin in the love of praise and distinction. Goodness may remain in his breast a passive guest ; and having no other power than to give countenance to the prevailing principle. It may thus reign in his language and reveries ; but the love of distinction directs his conduct. The superseded monarch enjoys the parade of state, and annexes his signature and sanction to the deeds of his active minister.

Perhaps it may now seem probable, that a man of constitutional goodness may perform beneficent actions, not from principles of humanity, though these may actually reside in his breast ; but from the desire of being distinguished as a generous person ; and that in the meanwhile, not discerning his real motives, he shall imagine himself actuated by pure generosity. That such characters may exist, is all that is hitherto asserted. That
Shake-

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 95

Shakespeare has exhibited an illustration, accurately defined and exquisitely featured, in his *Timon of Athens*, we will now endeavour to shew. We will endeavour to ascertain and trace, in the conduct of Timon, the marks of that beneficence which proceeds from the love of distinction. We will, at the same time, endeavour to trace the causes of the strange alteration that took place in his temper; and delineate the operations of those circumstances that changed him from being apparently social, and full of affection, into an absolute misanthrope.

I. Real goodness is not ostentatious. Not so is the goodness of Timon. Observe him in the first scene of the tragedy: trumpets sound; Timon enters; he is surrounded with senators, poets, painters, and attendants; chuses that moment to display his beneficence; and accompanies his benefits with a comment on his own noble nature.

I am

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I am not of that feather, to shake off
My friend when he most needs me.

II. He is impatient of admonition. Knowing that he was formerly influenced by sentiments of humanity, he supposes that their power is abiding; and that, as he continues to do good, his principles of action are still the same. He is exposed to this self-imposition, not only by the tendency which all men have to deceive themselves, but by the flatteries and praises he is fond of receiving.—Of consequence, he would suffer pain by being undeceived; he would lose the pleasure of that distinction which he so earnestly pursues; the prevailing passion would be counteracted: thus, there is a disposition in his soul, which leads him to be displeased with the truth; and who that is offended with the truth, can endure admonition?

AP. Thou giv'st so long, Timon, I fear me, thou
Wilt give away thyself in paper shortly:

What need these feasts, pomps, and vain glories?

TIM.

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 97

TIM. Nay,

If you begin to rail once on society,
I am sworn not to give regard to you.
Farewell, and come with better music.

AP. So——

Thou wilt not hear me now.

———Oh, that men's ears should be
To counsel deaf, but not to flattery.

III. The same self-deceit which renders him deaf to counsel, renders him solicitous and patient of excessive applause. He endures even the grossest adulation. Notwithstanding the covering which hides him from himself, he cannot be quite confident that his principles are just what he wishes and imagines them to be. The applauses he receives tend to obviate his uncertainty, and reconcile him to himself. Yet, it is not affirmed, that the man of conscious merit is either insensible of fame, or careless of reputation. He feels and enjoys them both; but having less need of external evidence to strengthen him in the belief of his own integrity,

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he is less voracious of praise, and more acute in the discernment of flattery.

IV. The favours bestowed by Timon, are not often of such a kind as to do real service to the persons who receive them. Wishing to be celebrated for his bounty, he is liberal in such a manner as shall be most likely to draw attention, and particularly to provoke the ostentation of those, on account of his munificence, whom he is inclined to benefit. He is therefore more liberal in gratifying their passions, and particularly their vanity, than in relieving their wants; and of contributing more to flatter their imaginations, than to promote their improvement. Though he performs some actions of real humanity, and even these he performs in a public manner, yet his munificence appears chiefly in his banquets and shewy presents.

V. He acts in the same manner, in the choice he makes of those whom he serves,
and

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 99

and on whom he confers his favours. He is not so solicitous of alleviating the distress of obscure affliction, as of gratifying those who enjoy some degree of distinction, or have it in their power to proclaim his praises. He is not represented as visiting the cottage of the fatherless and widow; but is wonderfully generous to men of high rank and character. He is desirous of encouraging merit; but the merit must be already known and acknowledged. Instead of drawing bashful worth from obscurity, he bestows costly baubles on those eminent or reputable persons who shall be attended to, if they publish his praises. These are such displays of beneficence, as a man of genuine goodness would be apt to avoid. Yet, the persons whom Timon honours and obliges, are loquacious poets, flattering painters, great generals, and mighty elders.

TIM. I take all, and your several visitations,
So kind to heart, 'tis not enough to give;

G

Methinks

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Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends,
And ne'er be weary. Alcibiades,
Thou art a soldier, therefore seldom rich;
It comes in charity to thee; for all thy living
Is 'mongst the dead; and all the lands thou hast
Lie in a pitched field.—

Yet, this seeming want of discernment in Timon, is not to be considered as a proof of weak understanding. Our poet, who has omitted nothing to render the features of this character, though perhaps not obvious, yet so distinct, consistent, and perfectly united, that there is scarcely a lineament too little or too much, has guarded him from this objection, and represents him as a man of ability. When the state, and rulers of Athens, in the hour of extreme urgency and distress, are threatened with an assault by Alcibiades, whom they had treated with disrespect, they have recourse for advice and assistance to no other than Timon. They tell him in terms of humble entreaty:

There-

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 101

Therefore, so please thee to return with us,
And of our Athens (thine and ours) to take
The Captainship, thou shalt be met with thanks,
Allow'd with absolute power, and thy good name
Live with authority; so soon shall we drive back
Of Alcibiades the approaches wild,
Who, like a boar, too savage, doth root up
His country's peace.——

VI. Timon is not more ostentatious,
impatient of admonition, desirous of ap-
plause, injudicious in his gifts, and undistin-
guishing in the choice of his friends, than he
is profuse. Desirous of superlative praises,
he endeavours, by lavish beneficence, to
have unbounded returns.

——— He outgoes

The very heart of kindness——

——— Plutus, the god of wealth,

Is but his steward.

The poet, with judicious invention,
deduces the chief incident in the play,
namely the reverse of Timon's fortune,
from this circumstance in his conduct.

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The vanity of Timon renders him profuse; and profusion renders him indigent.

VII. The character we are describing, sets a greater value on the favours he confers than they really deserve. Of a mind undisciplined by reason, and moved by a strong desire, he conceives the state of things to be exactly such as his present mood and desire represent them. Wishing to excite a high sense of favour, he believes he has done so, and that the gratifications he bestows are much greater than what they are. He is the more liable to this self-imposition, that many of those he is inclined to gratify, are no less lavish of their adulation than he is of his fortune. He does not perceive that the raptures they express are not for the benefit they have received, but for what they expect; and imagines, that while his chambers

Blaze with lights, and bray with minstrelsy;

while

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 103

while his cellars weep “with drunken
“spilth of wine;” while he is giving
away horses, and precious stones; enter-
taining the rulers and chief men of
Athens, he fondly fancies that he is kind-
ling in their breasts a sense of friendship
and obligation. He fondly fancies, that in
his utmost need, he will receive from them
every sort of assistance; and without re-
serve or reluctance, lays immediate claim
to their bounty.

—— You to Lord Lucius;
To Lord Lucullus, you—You to Sempronius:
Commend me to their loves—and I am proud, say,
That my occasions have found time to use them
Toward a supply of money: let the request
Be fifty talents.——
Go you, Sir, to the senators,
(Of whom, even to the state’s best health, I have
Deserved this hearing), bid them send on th’ instant,
A thousand talents to me.

VIII. Need we be surpris’d that Timon,
and men of his character, should meet
with disappointment? Howsoever they

G 3.

may

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may impose upon themselves, and believe they are moved by real friendship, and believe that they are conferring real benefits, the rest of mankind discern, and disapprove of their conduct. Even those very persons, who, by adulation, and a mean acceptance of favours, have contributed to their delusion, feel, or conceive themselves, under no obligation. The benefits they received were unsolicited, or unimportant; and the friendship of their benefactor was not so genuine as he believed. Thus, then, Timon demands a requital of his good deeds: he meets with refusal; when he solicits the affections of his professing friends, he is answered with coldness.

STR. Why, this is the world's sport;
And just of the same piece is every flatt'rer's soul.
—Timon has been this Lord's father—
He ne'er drinks,
But Timon's silver treads upon his lip;
And yet, (O see the monstrousness of man,
When he looks out in an ungrateful shape),

He

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 105

He does deny him, in respect of his,

What charitable men afford to beggars.

There is no one passage in the whole tragedy more happily conceived and expressed than the conduct of Timon's flatterers. Their various contrivances to avoid giving him assistance, shew diversity of character; and their behaviour is well contrasted, by the sincere sorrow and indignation of Timon's servants. They are held out to deserved scorn, by their easy belief that the decay of their benefactor's fortunes was only pretended, and by their consequent renewal of mean assiduities.

IX. It remains to be mentioned, that such disappointment, in tempers like that of Timon, begets not only resentment at individuals, but aversion at all mankind.

Timon imposes on himself; and while he is really actuated by a selfish passion, fancies himself entirely disinterested. Yet

he has no select friends; and no particular attachments. He receives equally the deserving and undeserving; the stranger and the familiar acquaintance. Of consequence, those persons with whom he seems intimate, have no concern in his welfare; yet, vainly believing that he merits their affections, he solicits their assistance, and sustains disappointment. His resentment is roused; and he suffers as much pain, though perhaps of a different kind, as, in a similar situation, a person of true affection would suffer. But its object is materially different. For against whom is his anger excited? Not against one individual, for he had no individual attachment; but against all those who occasioned his disappointment: that is, against all those who were, or whom he desired should be, the objects of his beneficence; in other words, against all mankind. In such circumstances, the violence of resentment will be proportioned

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 107

tioned to original sensibility; and Shakspeare, accordingly, has represented the wrath of Timon as indulging itself in furious invective, till it grows into lasting aversion.

TIM. Who dares, who dares,
In purity of manhood stand upright,
And say, this man's a flatterer? If one be,
So are they all; for every greeze of fortune
Is smother'd by that below: the learned pate
Ducks to the golden fool: all is oblique—
———Then be abhorr'd,
All feasts, societies, and throngs of men!
His semblable, yea himself, Timon disdains;
Destruction phang mankind! Earth give me roots!
Who seeks for better of thee, sauce his palate
With thy most operant poison.

The symptoms already mentioned are numerous, and indicate to the attentive observer, that the state of Timon's mind is more distempered with a selfish passion than he believes: yet the poet, by a device suited to his own masterly invention, contrives an additional method of conveying

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veying a distinct and explicit view of the real design. Apemantus, a character well invented and well supported, has no other business in the play, than to explain the principles of Timon's conduct. His cynic furliness, indeed, forms a striking contrast to the smoothness of Timon's flatterers; but he is chiefly considered as unveiling the principal character. His manners are fierce; but his intentions are friendly: his invectives are bitter; but his remarks are true. He tells the flattering poet who had written a panegyric on Timon, that he was worthy of him; and adds, even in Timon's presence, "He that loves to be flattered, is worthy of the flatterer." He tells Timon, inviting him to his banquet—"I scorn thy meat; 'twould choke me, for I should ne'er flatter thee." Elsewhere he gives him admonitions to the very same purpose; and finding his advice undervalued, he subjoins—"I will lock thy heaven

" from

OF TIMON OF ATHENS. 109

“from thee ;” meaning, as a commentator has well explained it, the pleasure of being flattered. He afterwards tells him, having followed him, nevertheless, into his solitude, with intentions of rendering him some assistance ;

————— What, thinkest
That the bleak air, thy boist'rous chamberlain,
Will put thy shirt on warm ? Will those moss'd trees,
That have outliv'd the eagle, page thy heels,
And skip when thou point'st out ? Will the cold brook,
Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste,
To cure thy o'er-night's surfeit ? Call the creatures
Whose naked natures live in all the spite
Of wreckful heaven, whose bare unhoused trunks
To the conflicting elements exposed,
Answer mere nature—bid them flatter thee—
O ! thou shalt find——

There are few instances of a dramatic character executed with such strict regard to unity of design, as that of Timon. This is not all. It is not enough to say, that all the parts of his conduct are consistent, or connected with one general prin-

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principle. They have an union of a more intimate nature. All the qualities in his character, and all the circumstances in his conduct, lead to one final event. They all co-operate, directly or indirectly, in the accomplishment of one general purpose. It is as if the poet had proposed to demonstrate, how persons of good temper, and social dispositions, may become misanthropical. He assumes the social dispositions to be constitutional, and not confirmed by reason or by reflection. He then employs the love of distinction to bring about the conclusion. He shews its effects, in superseding the influence of better principles, in assuming their appearance, and so, in establishing self-deceit. He shews its effects, in producing ostentation, injudicious profusion, and disappointment. And lastly, he shews how its effects contributed to excite and exasperate those bitter feelings which estranged Timon from all mankind. Timon, at
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OF TIMON OF ATHENS. III

the beginning of the drama, seems altogether humane and affectionate; at the end he is an absolute misanthrope. Such opposition indicates inconsistency of character; unless the change can be traced through its causes and progress. If it can be traced, and if the appearance shall seem natural, this aspect of the human mind affords a curious and very interesting spectacle. Observe, in an instance or two, the fine lineaments and delicate shadings of this singular character. The poet refuses admission even to those circumstances which may be suitable, and consistent enough with the general principle; but which would rather *coincide* with the main design, than *contribute* to its consummation. Timon is lavish; but he is neither dissolute nor intemperate. He is convivial; but he enjoys the banquet not in his own, but in the pleasure of his guests. Though he displays the pomp of a masquerade, Phrynia and Timandria are
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in the train not of Timon, but of Alcibiades. He tells us, alluding to the correctness of his deportment,

No villainous bounty yet hath pass'd my heart;
Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given.

We may observe, too, that he is not so desirous of being distinguished for mere external magnificence, as of being distinguished for courteous and beneficent actions. He does some good, but it is to procure distinction; he solicits distinction, but it is by doing good.

Upon the whole, "Shakespeare, in his
"Timon of Athens, illustrates the con-
"sequences of that inconsiderate profusion
"which has the appearance of liberality,
"and is supposed by the inconsiderate per-
"son himself to proceed from a generous
"principle; but which, in reality, has its
"chief origin in the love of distinction."

ESSAY

ESSAY IV.

ON THE FAULTS OF SHAKESPEARE.

THE Commentators on Shakespeare have been accused of blind admiration. They are charged with over-rating his merits; and of regarding his faults with excessive indulgence. Only the last part of the charge has a foundation in justice. His merits have never been over-rated. The ardours of poetical fancy, the energies of strong expression, and unrivalled skill in delineating human nature, belong to him in a degree so conspicuous, as to justify the warmest applauses, and even to excuse, in some measure, the indulgence shewn him for his
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transgressions. Yet his transgressions are great: nor have they passed altogether unnoticed. Foreign critics have assailed him with virulence, and have loaded his faults with the aggravations of national prejudice. Even in Britain, the praise of Shakespeare is often mingled with lamentations for his offences. His inattention to the laws of unity, to say nothing of his deviations from geographical and historical truth; his rude mixture of tragic and comic scenes; together with the vulgarity, and even indecency of language, admitted too often into his dialogue, have exposed him to frequent censure. To censure him for his faults is proper; it is even necessary; it hinders blind admiration from tainting the public taste; for offences against taste are more dangerous in men of genius, than in other persons; and the undistinguishing praises so profusely bestowed on Shakespeare, have

have contributed a good deal to retard our improvement in dramatical writing.

Is it then possible, that a man of genius, eminently conspicuous in one of the highest departments of elegant composition, can trespass against taste; and contribute, even in fine writing, to pervert the judgment? Or is it likely that taste and genius should depend upon different principles? They are, no doubt, a-kin; yet they are not so closely related, as that they may not be found apart. Many men, without possessing a single ray of invention, can discern what is excellent in fine writing, and even feel its effects. But is it probable, that men of ardent fancy, of active invention, endowed with talents for various expression, and every power of poetical execution, are incapable, even in their own department, of perceiving, or feeling, what is fair or sublime? Shall the spectator be ravished with unspeakable transport; and shall the breast of him who communicates rapture be dark or joyless? Such asser-

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tion is certainly bold; and though it seems implied in the charge against Shakespear, it must be heard with restriction.

As every work that belongs to the imagination, all the performances of the poet, the painter, or statuary, consist of parts, the pleasure we receive from them is the effect of those parts acting in proper union. The general delightful influence of such combinations may be strongly felt, without our being able to distinguish their component members, whether of larger or of less dimension; or the nature of the relation subsisting between them. Many tears have been shed for the sufferings of Jane Shore and Calista; yet the persons who have shed them may not have known by what art they were moved. We may also observe, that the variety, the arrangement, the proportions, and mutual relations of those parts, which, united in a fine performance, afford us supreme delight, may be seen and distinguished by persons, who,
from

OF SHAKESPEARE. 117

from insensibility natural or acquired, are incapable of feeling their influence, or of perceiving them with exquisite pleasure. The accomplished critic must both feel what is excellent, and discern its nature. Yet, there are critics who discern, and never seem to have felt. But, besides feeling and discernment, a certain portion of knowledge is indispensably requisite: for offences against historical, or obvious philosophical truths, either in those that perform a work, or in those that judge of a performance, cannot fail of exciting disgust. Thus, consummate taste requires that we be capable of feeling what is excellent; that we be capable, in some measure, of discerning the parts, and correspondence of parts, which, in works of invention, occasion excellence; and that we have competent knowledge in those things which are the subjects of an artist's labour.

Now, every man of poetic invention must receive exquisite pleasure in con-

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templating the great and the beautiful, both of art and of nature. He possesses taste, in so far as it depends upon feeling; and in so far as a familiar acquaintance with beauty confers improvement, his taste will improve. But he may want discernment: for though the powers of discernment are bestowed by nature, yet their perfection depends upon culture. He may not perceive proportion or union of parts in those things that give him pleasure; he may be totally ignorant of every fact concerning them, except in so far as they work immediately on his senses; and thus, in so far as taste depends upon intellectual improvement, he is certainly defective. He may weep for the death of Lausus, as related by Virgil, without observing that the skill of the poet, in selecting and arranging those images that excite kindred emotions, is the magic power that affects him. He may be moved with an interesting story of a Bohemian Princess, and not know
that

that no such Princess existed, or that Bohemia is not, according to Shakespeare's representation, a maritime country.— Thus, with matchless pathetic abilities, with uncommon ardour of fancy, and force of expression, he may delineate the sufferings of kings and of princes; but by mistaking historical facts, and still more, by blending incongruous emotions, he may excite such disgust as shall diminish the pleasure he would have given us; and occasion our regret, that his knowledge had not been more extensive, or his critical discernment more improved.

But will not his feelings preserve him from error? Will not their immediate and lively interposition irradiate his mind, and give him a clearer view of the justness and truth of things, than he can receive from metaphysical reasoning or dry disquisition? Surely no feelings can communicate the knowledge of facts; and though sensibility of soul may dispose the mind to a readier discernment of re-

lation and connection, in the objects of our attention, yet it is not by sensibility alone that we are capable of discerning. But allowing it to be so; allowing that there may be some spirits so finely framed, that, with powers of active invention, they can, independent of cool disquisition, and without enquiring after union and relation of parts, feel, by immediate impulse, every effect of the most exquisite arrangement; and be able, by attending to the degrees of pleasure they receive, to ascertain the precise proportion, the abundance, or defect of excellence, in a work: admitting the possibility of such endowment, he who is thus highly distinguished, is not, by means of this constitution, exempt from error; he is not placed beyond the risk of misjudging, nor rendered incapable of feeling amiss. He cannot be sure of his feelings. They are of a shifting and versatile nature. They depend on the present humour, or state of mind; and who can say of the
present

present humour, it will last for a moment? Who can assure us, especially if we aspire at the honour of extreme sensibility and exquisite nerves, that our present mood shall not be totally different from that which shall follow? If so, the colours and attitudes of things shall seem totally changed: we shall feel very different emotions, and entertain very opposite sentiments. Could the man of genius depend on his feelings; could he assure himself that no contrary motions would oppose the natural tendencies of a delicate spirit; or, in particular, that the influence of fashion should never efface from his heart the true impressions of beauty; or that the authority of maxims, specious or ill explained, should never pervert the operations of fancy; he might proceed with impetuous career; and, guided by the pleasing irradiations of feeling, he might scorn the toil of that minute attention by which alone he might gain discernment.

cernment. Were there no adverse currents, strong, but of silent progress; no shifting gales to drive him out of his course, or no clouds to obscure the face of the sky, he might give full scope to his sails, and, observing no other direction than the beams of some bright constellation, he might proceed on a prosperous voyage, and land at length on some blissful island. But he has to encounter opposing currents, to contend with impetuous tempests; his guiding star may be involved in a storm, and his burnished vessel may be dashed upon rocks, or shipwrecked on dangerous sands.

The man of true taste must not only be capable of feeling, but of judging. He must ascertain his feelings. He must distinguish those that are just and natural, from those that are spurious. He must have steady principles of judgment; and establish a rule of belief to which his understanding may for ever appeal, and set

set at defiance the effects of fleeting emotion. We are not always in the same state of mind; we are more susceptible at one time than another: even the same appearance shall at different moments affect us differently; and we shall be capable of relishing at one time, what, in a less happy mood, would have given us no sort of pleasure. Nay, our sensibility may be, occasionally, not only dull, but sickly; and we may be apt to find pleasure in those things, which, in themselves, are neither wholesome nor innocent. Add to this, that feelings of respect for celebrated characters may be as powerful in our minds as those of beauty and harmony; or the authority of a favourite critic may seduce us into erroneous opinions. Thus it is manifest, that trusting to feeling alone, our judgments may be capricious, unsteady, and inconsistent.

It is in morals as in criticism. Our judgments, and our conduct, must be
 established

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established upon those maxims that may have been suggested by feeling, but which must derive their force and stability from reason and deep reflection. We must have certain rules to direct our deportment, in those moments of languor and dereliction, when the heart feels not the present influence of compassion, tenderness, and such amiable dispositions as produce excellent conduct. Those celestial visitants do not sojourn continually in the human breast. Reason, therefore, and reflection, ought to preserve such tokens and memorials of their pleasing intercourse, as shall make us, in their absence, act in full confidence that they are congenial with our nature, and will again return. By this due recollection, they will be induced to return; and, perhaps, to dwell in our breasts for ever. But, without such resolutions; without acting as if we felt compassion and humanity, in the hope that we shall really feel

feel them; and without rendering the sense of duty an established principle of action, we shall, in moments of feeble coldness, be not only feeble, but selfish; and not only cold, but inhuman. Our reason will be of no other service, than to assist or justify the perverse inclination; and a habit of callous insensibility may thus be contracted. It is needless to pursue the resemblance. It might easily be shewn, that in the conduct of life, no less than in our judgments concerning fine composition, if we have no determined principles, independent of present emotion, our deportment will be capricious, unsteady, and inconsistent*.

In particular, the man of mere sensibility, who has not established to himself, either in morals or in criticism, any rule of immutable conduct, and who depends on feeling alone for the propriety of his
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* See the Essay on Lear.

judgments, may be misled by the application of those general rules that direct the conduct of others. His bosom is not always equally susceptible of fine emotion; yet, under the necessity of acting or of judging, and in a moment of dreary dereliction, forsaken for a time by those boasted feelings that are the guides of his life, he will be apt to follow the fashion; or, apprehending that he is conducting himself according to those well-established principles that influence men of worth, he will be apt to fall into error. This will be particularly the case, if any maxim is held forth as a rule of conduct, proceeding upon rational views, and coinciding in general with the prepossessions of sensibility; but which requiring to be attentively studied, well understood, and admitted with due extension, may, nevertheless, be expressed in such general terms, with so much brevity, and apparently of such easy comprehension, as that it is often

often adopted without due extension; without being studied or understood. Moreover, the warmest advocate for the powers of feeling will allow, that they are often attended with distrust, hesitation, and something like conscious weakness. Hence it is, that persons of mere sensibility are ready to avail themselves of any thing like a general maxim, which falls in with their own inclinations; and having no general maxim which is really their own, ascertained and established by their own experience and reflection, they will be apt to embrace the dictates of others. Thus even an excellent rule, ill understood, will consequently be ill applied, and instead of guiding men aright, will lead them into the mazes of error.

I am inclined to believe, and shall now endeavour to illustrate, that the greatest blemishes in Shakespeare have proceeded from his want of consummate taste. Having no perfect discernment, proceeding

ing from rational investigation, of the true cause of beauty in poetical composition, he had never established in his mind any system of regular process, or any standard of dramatic excellence. He felt the powerful effects of beauty; he wrote under the influence of feeling; but was apt to be misled by those general maxims, which are often repeated, but ill understood; which have foundation in truth, but must be followed with caution.

No maxim has been more frequently repeated, and more strongly enforced upon poets, than that which requires them to "follow nature." The greatest praise they expect is, that their representations are natural; and the greatest censure they dread is, that their conduct is opposite. It is by this maxim that the errors of Shakespeare have been defended; and probably by this maxim he was perverted. "Can we suppose," it may be said,

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said, "that the ruin of kings, and the
"downfal of kingdoms, have been ac-
"complished merely by heroes and
"princes? May not inferior agents, and
"even the meanest of mankind, have
"contributed to such catastrophe? Or
"can we suppose, that during the pro-
"gress of great events, none of the real
"agents have ever smiled, or have ever
"indulged themselves in trifling dis-
"course? Must they maintain, during
"the whole performance, the most uni-
"form gravity of aspect, and solemn
"state of demeanour? Is it not natural,
"if a grave must be dug for a dead body,
"that the grave-diggers be persons of
"the lowest rank; and if so, that their
"conversation be suited to their condi-
"tion? Of consequence, the language
"of Tragedy will not always maintain
"the same dignity of expression. Even
"kings and queens, moved by some
"violent passion, will be inclined to
"speak

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“speak like their subjects, and utter
 “terms, that, to very delicate critics,
 “may seem ill suited to their rank. So-
 “lemn statesmen may indulge in trivial
 “garrulity; and grave senators may act
 “or speak like the vulgar. Now, is
 “not the poet to follow nature? And if
 “he is to represent persons in the highest
 “departments of life, must he not re-
 “present them in their real appearance?
 “Or must they be totally disguised, re-
 “fined, and exalted, according to the en-
 “thusiasm of a glowing fancy?”—It is
 in this manner that the mixture of tragic
 with comic scenes, and the gross vulga-
 rity of language to which our poet,
 notwithstanding his amazing powers of
 expression, too often descends, are de-
 fended; and, perhaps, as was already
 mentioned, some considerations of this
 sort have been the cause of his errors.
 Indeed, the facts in this supposed de-
 fence are admitted. Persons of high
 rank,

rank, in the execution of great undertakings, may employ mercenary and vulgar engines; and may adapt their conversation to the meanest of their associates. Mighty men may be coarse and offensive; grave senators may, like some of those represented by Otway, be contemptibly sensual; and even an English Princess, agreeably to the representation of Shakespeare, addressed by a deformed and loathsome lover, may spit in his face, and call him "hedge-hog." A Roman matron, disputing with the tribunes of the people, who were persecuting her son to death, might with propriety enough have called them "cats." A senator of Rome, in the midst of much civil dissention, might have said of himself, that "he was a humorous patrician, and one that loved a cup of hot wine without a drop of allaying Tiber;" or in a debate with the above-mentioned tribunes, he might tell them, that they, "racked

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"Rome

"Rome to make coals cheap;" or, with perfect consistency of character, and truth of description, while, in a deep tragedy, he is delineating the reserve of a discontented general, he might say of him, that "the tartness of his face sours ripe grapes; that his hum is like a battery; and that he sits in his state like a thing made for Alexander." All these things may have happened, and as they may happen again, they may be termed natural. Yet, I conceive that the solemn, in dramatical composition, should be kept apart from the ludicrous; that Shakespeare, by confounding them, has incurred merited censure; and that he probably fell into error by following the authority of inexplicit, or unexamined decrees.

There is a certain consistency of passion, emotion, and sentiment, to be observed in fine writing; not less important than unity of action, and of much greater con-

consequence than the unities either of time or of place. The mind is not only pained by feelings disagreeable in themselves, but, independent of their particular character and effect, it is pained by being distracted and harassed. Now, this discomposure is produced; if opposite feelings, though in themselves agreeable, are poured in upon us at once, or in immediate succession. As the tendency of these dissonant emotions is to destroy one another, the mind, during the contest, is in a state of distraction. Nor can either of the contending feelings accomplish their full effect; for the attention is too equally divided between them, or transferred so rapidly from one object to another, that the pleasure they would yield is imperfect. Add to this, that in cases of such disorder, the finer feeling is generally overpowered by the coarser and more tumultuous. A ludicrous character, or incident, introduced into a pa-

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thetic scene, will draw the chief attention to itself; and by ill-timed merriment, banish the softer pleasures. This subject will receive more illustration, if we attend to the success of those authors who have understood and availed themselves of the foregoing maxim. From this proceeds the chief merit of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Intending in his *L'Allegro* to excite cheerfulness, he deals solely in cheerful objects: intending in his *Il Penseroso* to promote a melancholy mood, he has recourse to those images only that are connected with solitude and gloomy silence. If you would make us weep with compassion, do not strive at the same instant to convulse us with laughter. Or if you mean to exalt your audience with solemn and sublime devotion, you will not address them with fantastic levity, nor amuse them with a merry tune. The propriety of adhering to one leading idea, or in other words,

OF SHAKESPEARE. 135

words, of moving the mind by one particular set of feelings, has been attended to in other imitative arts. We find nothing in music or painting, so inconsistent as the dissonant mixture of sentiments and emotions so frequent in English tragedy. The improvers in gardening are attentive to the same observances. They tell us, with great justice, that in a solemn scene, every thing light and airy should be concealed and removed; that where sublimity constitutes the chief expression, every circumstance should be great or terrific; and, in general, that all subordinate incidents should be suited to the reigning character*. Even Shakespeare himself, in many brilliant passages, where he follows the guidance of genius alone, or of unperturbed sensibility, and, indeed, in all those detached passages that are usually mentioned as possessing singu-

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* See "Observations on Modern Gardening," Sec. 50.

lar excellence, acts in perfect consistency with these observations. Every circumstance in his description of departed spirits, in "Measure for Measure," without suggesting noisome, disgusting objects, are directly calculated to fill the mind with delightful awe.

Now, if consistency of feeling and sentiment is to be observed in fine writing, it will affect our imitations of nature. It will lead us to bring more fully into view, than in the original, those things that carry forward, or coincide with, our purpose; and to conceal those circumstances which may be of an opposite or unsuitable tendency. If we would describe a cheerful landscape, we will avoid mentioning the gloomy forests, or deep morasses, which may actually exist in it. In like manner, if we would dispose our audience to entertain sentiments of veneration for some respectable personage, we will throw into the shade those levities which may have

have place in the character, but which lessen his dignity. In the fictions of the poet it is allowable, not only to veil infirmities, or to soften and conceal harsh or unbending features, but from the storehouses of fancy and observation to make such additions, both to the landscape and to the character, as shall equally promote our pleasure and our esteem.

Does this rule, then, contradict the great maxim of following nature? Or is there any necessity imposed upon us, of adopting the one and rejecting the other? If so, to which shall we yield the preference? We are not, however, reduced to this difficulty. We may both follow nature, not, indeed, as servile copyists, but as free disciples; and preserve at the same time consistency of feeling and expression.—When a judicious improver covers a bleak heath with enlivening groves, or removes the dreariness of a noisome fen, by changing it into a lovely lake, inter-

spersed with islands, can we accuse him of departing from nature? Indeed he varies her appearance, but at the same time improves them, and renders them more agreeable to our conceptions of excellence. In like manner, the poet who excludes from tragedy mean persons and vulgar language, because they are dissonant to the general tone of his work, neither violates nature, nor trespasses against the great obligation he is under of affording us pleasure.

Now, though the spirit of this important rule has at all times operated on the practice of eminent writers, and hath even, on many occasions, influenced the daring, but delicate fancy of Shakespeare; yet, in so far as I recollect, the rule itself has seldom been considered by the authors or judges of dramatic writing, in Britain, as of inviolable obligation. Thus, the maxim of following nature, a maxim most important in itself, and almost coeval with

with fine writing, has been received without proper extension: for it has commonly been conceived, that by the term Nature, as used by the critics, we are to understand the real appearances of things as they exist originally, and unimproved by human art. According to this account, a tree with luxuriant branches, and that has never been pruned, is natural. Nevertheless, we may collect from the foregoing remarks, that this explanation is by far too limited. The human mind is capable of discerning and conceiving excellence, superior to any thing we have ever beheld. This excellence, however, does not belong to new objects, but to the improved and exalted state of those things with which we are already acquainted. We cannot imagine a new race of animated beings, different in every respect, except that of animation alone, from the living creatures that we already know; but we can conceive
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the present inhabitants of our planet exalted to a degree of perfection far superior to any of the human race. This idea of excellence, therefore, is natural to the human mind: the manner in which it is formed may easily be traced; and those representations of external things, which differ from the real appearance, but coincide with our notions of improvement, are to be held natural. This may receive still farther illustration. If by nature we are to understand the original, unimproved appearance of things, the wild American savage is more according to nature than the civilized European. Yet, will any one be bold enough to affirm, that a mind highly improved and adorned with science, is in a state that is unnatural? Neither shall we say so of the tree which is pruned and grafted, for the purpose of bearing fruit; and which, left to its original luxuriance, would shoot away into useless foliage. By the culture of
mind,

mind, and by the improvement of external objects, that excellence which we conceive, is in part attained, and is held to be according to nature. We cannot, therefore, pronounce of that superior excellence which has not yet been attained, and which hitherto exists only in idea, that it is unnatural. Now, the rule of following nature having probably been understood by Shakespeare in a sense too limited, has betrayed him into those enormities that have incurred so much censure. Even his display of character has sometimes been injured in its effect, by this undeviating attachment to real appearance: and though, like Polonius, statesmen and courtiers may, on various occasions, be very wise and very foolish; yet, whatsoever indulgence may be shewn to the statesmen and courtiers of real life, those of the drama must be of an uniform and consistent conduct. Indeed, in comedy, there is nothing to hinder them
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from appearing as ludicrous as in real life, or as the poet pleases.

The other blemishes in Shakespeare are less enormous; and proceed chiefly from his want of critical and historical knowledge; or from want of anxiety in correcting his works. Had he been well acquainted with the poets and critics of antiquity, he would probably have been more attentive to unity, and studied greater simplicity in the form of his fables. Not that he would have adopted the practice of ancient poets, in its fullest extent; for this would have been too opposite to the public taste, and too inconsistent with his own luxuriant fancy. We may also add, that some departure from the strict rules of unity enacted by ancient critics, and some deviation from the simplicity of Grecian poets, is no loss to the drama. Shakespeare, however, by having known them, and by having adhered to them in some degree, would have
been

been less irregular and incoherent. In like manner, by having been more acquainted with ancient history, he would not have represented Alexander the Great as existing prior to the age of Coriolanus; nor would he have represented the Roman matrons, in the days of Menenius Agrippa, as employing themselves in sewing cambric; nor would he have mentioned the tribunes of the Roman people as judges in the courts of justice, or even at great pains to lower the price of coals; nor would he have insinuated that the Volscians, either before or after eating, were accustomed to say grace.

Yet, glaring as these faults may appear, poets of no small reputation have been so far seduced, by the example of Shakespeare coinciding with the taste of the times, that they have imitated, or at least not avoided, the very grossest of his enormities. Otway and Southern are remarkable instances. It may, therefore, be of service to the improvement of
fine

fine writing, not only to illustrate the great merits of Shakespeare, and to shew in what manner his delineations of human nature may assist the philosopher; but also with candour, and the deference due to his superior genius, to have pointed out his defects, and endeavour to trace their causes. In this investigation, the train of thought, independent of digression or illustration, is according to the following arrangement.

As the works of imagination consist of parts, the pleasure they yield is the effect of those parts united in one design. This effect may be felt; the relations of inferior, component parts, may be discerned; and their nature may be known. Taste is perfect, when sensibility, discernment, and knowledge, are united. Yet, they are not indispensably united in the man of poetic invention. He must possess sensibility; but he may want knowledge and discernment. He will thus be liable to error. Guided solely
by

by feeling, his judgment will be unsteady; he will, at periods of languor, become the slave of authority, or be seduced by unexamined maxims. Shakespeare was in this situation. Endowed with genius, he possessed all the taste that depended on feeling. But unimproved by the discernment of the philosophical, or the knowledge of the learned critic, his sensibility was exposed to perversion. He was misled by the general maxim that required him to "follow nature." He observed the rule in a limited sense. He copied the reality of external things; but disregarded that idea of excellence which seems inherent in the human mind. The rule, in its extended acceptation, requires, that objects intended to please, and interest the heart, should produce their effect, by corresponding or consonant feelings. Now, this cannot be attained by representing objects as they appear. In every interesting representation, features and tints must be added to

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the reality; features and tints which it actually possesses, must be concealed. The greatest blemishes in Shakspeare arose from his not attending to this important rule; and not preserving in his tragedies the proper tone of the work. Hence the frequent and unbecoming mixture of meanness and dignity in his expression; of the serious and ludicrous in his representation. His other faults are of less importance; and are charged to his want of sufficient knowledge, or care in correcting. In a word, though his merits far surpass those of every other dramatic writer, and may even apologize for his faults; yet, since the ardour of admiration may lead ingenious men to overlook, or imitate, his imperfections, it may be of some service, "to point them out, and endeavour to trace their causes."

ESSAY

ESSAY V.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

HAMLET;

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,

I THANK you for your remarks on my account of Hamlet. Yet I frankly confess, that notwithstanding their ingenuity, I still adhere to my opinion*; and

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* Analysis of Shakespeare's Characters, p. 36, 3d Edit.

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as I am solicitous that you should agree with me, I will, as briefly as possible, lay my reasons before you. Nor have I any doubt, but that the same candour which dictated the objections, will procure attention to the reply. Allow me, then, to plead in behalf of Hamlet; and of Shakespeare*, if he need such aid; and of the Public, who, by always interesting themselves in the fate of Hamlet, have, in this most unequivocal manner, as on many other occasions, expressed their approbation of Shakespeare.

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The strongest feature in the mind of Hamlet, as exhibited in the tragedy, is an exquisite sense of moral conduct. He displays, at the same time, great sensibility of temper; and is, therefore, most "tremblingly alive" to every incident or event that befalls him. His affections are ardent,

* Si tali auxilio.

ardent, and his attachments lasting. He also displays a strong sense of character; and therefore, a high regard for the opinions of others. His good sense, and excellent dispositions, in the early part of his life, and in the prosperous state of his fortune, rendered him amiable and beloved. No misfortune had hitherto befallen him; and though he is represented to be susceptible of lively feelings, we have no evidence of his having ever shewn any symptoms of a morose or melancholy disposition. On the contrary, the melancholy which throws so much gloom upon him in the course of the play, appears to his former friends and acquaintance altogether unusual and unaccountable.

— Something you have heard
Of Hamlet's transformation: so I call it;
Since nor th' exterior, nor the inward man,
Resembles that it was.

In the conduct, however, which he displays, in the progress of the tragedy,

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he appears irresolute and indecisive; he accordingly engages in enterprizes in which he fails; he discovers reluctance to perform actions, which, we think, needed no hesitation; he proceeds to violent outrage, where the occasion does not seem to justify violence; he appears jocular where his situation is most serious and alarming; he uses subterfuges not consistent with an ingenuous mind; and expresses sentiments not only immoral, but inhuman.

This charge is heavy: yet every reader, and every audience, have hitherto taken part with Hamlet. They have not only pitied, but esteemed him; and the voice of the people, in poetry as well as politics, deserves some attention. Let us enquire, therefore, whether those particulars which have given such offence, may not be considered as the infirmities of a mind constituted like that of Hamlet, and placed in such trying circumstances, ra-

ther than indications of folly, or proofs of inherent guilt. If so, he will still continue the proper object of our compassion, of our regret, and esteem. The award of the public will receive confirmation.

Consider, then, how a young person of good sense, of strong moral feelings, possessing an exquisite sense of character, great sensibility, together with much ardour and constancy of affection, would be apt to conduct himself, in a situation so peculiar as that of Hamlet. He loses a respectable father; nay, he has some reason to suspect, that his father had been treacherously murdered; that his uncle was the perpetrator of the cruel deed; and that his mother, whom he tenderly loved, was an accomplice in the guilt: he sees her suddenly married to the suspected murderer; he is himself excluded from his birth-right; he is placed in a conspicuous station; the world expects of him that he will resent or avenge his

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wrongs: while in the mean time he is justly apprehensive of his being surrounded with spies and informers. In these circumstances, and of such a character, if the poet had represented him as acting with steady vigour and unexceptionable propriety, he would have represented not Hamlet, but a creature so fanciful, as to have no prototype in human nature. We are not, therefore, to expect, that his conduct is to proceed according to the most infallible rules of discretion or of propriety. We must look for frailties and imperfections; but for the frailties and imperfections of Hamlet.

I. The injuries he has sustained, the guilt of Claudius, and the perversion of Gertrude, excite his resentment, and indignation. Regard for the opinions of others, who expect such resentment in the Prince of Denmark, promotes the passion. He therefore meditates, and resolves on vengeance. But the moment

he

he forms his resolution, the same virtuous sensibility, and the same regard to character, that roused his indignation, suggest objections. He entertains a doubt concerning the ground of his suspicions, and the evidence upon which he proceeds.

———— The spirit that I've seen

May be a devil; and the devil hath power

T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and, perhaps,

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

(As he is very potent with such spirits),

Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds

More relative than this.

In this manner he becomes irresolute and indecisive. Additionally, therefore, to the sorrow and melancholy which he necessarily feels for the situation of his family, and which his peculiar frame of mind renders unusually poignant, the harassment of such an inward struggle aggravates his affliction. His sense of duty, a regard to character, and feelings of just resentment, prompt him to revenge: the

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uncertainty of his suspicions, the fallacious nature of the evidence on which he proceeds, and the dread of perpetrating injustice, embarrass and arrest his purpose.

The time is out of joint—O cursed spight,
That ever I was born to set it right.

This irresolution, which indeed blasts his designs, but does not lessen our regard for his character, nor our compassion for his misfortunes, and the misery with which it afflicts him, are pathetically described and expressed, in the famous soliloquy consequent to the representation of the Players.

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? &c.—Yet I, &c.

II. In that particular mood, when he sees his own wrongs and the guilt of Claudius in a striking light, his resentment

ment is inflamed, his evidence seems convincing; and he acts with a violence and precipitation very dissimilar to, though not inconsistent with, his native temper. In these circumstances, or at a time when he tells us he

——— Could drink hot blood!

And do such bitter business, as the day

Would quake to look on!

In such a situation and state of mind, he slew Polonius: he mistook him for the king; and so acted with a violence and precipitation of which he afterwards expresses his repentances. In a similar situation, when he had no leisure nor inclination to weigh and examine appearances, he wrote the death-warrant of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Being thus benett'd round with villanies,

Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,

They had begun the play: I fat me down,

Devis'd a new commission, &c.

An earnest conjuration from the king,

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As England was his faithful tributary,
That on the view and knowing of these contents,
He should the bearers put to sudden death.

Rolencrantz and Guildenstern had been employed as spies upon Hamlet: under the disguise of friendship for him, they had accepted of this infamous office; they were in some measure accessory to his intended assassination: "they made love to this employment;" and therefore, as "the defeat grew from their own insinuation," there was no occasion why it "should sit near to Hamlet's conscience." If leisure had been given him to reflect, perhaps he would not have sacrificed them; but having done the deed, he does not charge himself with deliberate guilt. He does not contend that his conduct was entirely blameless; he only tells us,

They are not *near* my conscience.

III. Thus agitated by external circumstances, torn by contending emotions,
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liable to the weaknesses nearly allied to extreme sensibility, and exhausted by the contests of violent passions; is it wonderful that he should exhibit dejection of mind, and express distrelsh for every human enjoyment? This extreme is no less consistent with his character than his temporary violence. "I have of late," he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "lost
 " all my mirth; forgone all custom of
 " exercises; and, indeed, it goes so hea-
 " vily with my disposition, that this
 " goodly frame, the earth, seems to me
 " a sterile promontory; this most excel-
 " lent canopy, the air; look you, this
 " brave o'er-hanging firmament; this
 " majestical roof fretted with golden fire;
 " why, it appears no other thing to me
 " than a foul and pestilent congregation
 " of vapours," &c. In like manner, the same state of internal contest leads him to a conduct directly opposite to that of violence or precipitancy; and when we ex-
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pect that he will give full vent to his resentment, he hesitates and recedes. This is particularly illustrated in the very difficult scene where Hamlet, seeing Claudius kneeling and employed in devotion, expresses the following soliloquy:

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do it:—and so he goes to heaven;
And so am I reveng'd? That would be scann'd,
A villain kills my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge:
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And, how his audit stands, who knows, save heaven?
But, in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then reveng'd,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?

You ask me, why he did not kill the Usurper? And I answer, because he was at that instant irresolute. This irresolution arose from the inherent principles of

of his constitution, and is to be accounted natural: it arose from virtuous, or at least from amiable, sensibility, and therefore cannot be blamed. His sense of justice, or his feelings of tenderness, in a moment when his violent emotions were not excited, overcame his resentment. But you will urge the inconsistency of this account, with the inhuman sentiments he expresses:

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid pent:
When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage, &c.
Then trip him up, &c.

In reply to this difficulty, and it is not inconsiderable, I will venture to affirm, that these are not his real sentiments. There is nothing in the whole character of Hamlet that justifies such savage enormity. We are therefore bound, in justice and candour, to look for some hypothesis that shall reconcile what he now delivers, with his usual maxims and general deportment.

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portment. I would ask, then, whether, on many occasions, we do not alledge those considerations as the motives of our conduct, which really are not our motives? Nay, is not this sometimes done almost without our knowledge? Is it not done when we have no intention to deceive others; but when, by the influences of some present passion, we deceive ourselves? The fact is confirmed by experience, if we commune with our own hearts; and by observation, if we look around. When the profligate is accused of enormities, he will have them pass for manly spirit, or love of society; and imposes this opinion not upon others, but on himself. When the miser indulges his love of wealth, he says, and believes, that he follows the maxims of a laudable œconomy. So also, while the censorious and invidious slanderer gratifies his malignity, he boasts, and believes, that he obeys the dictates of justice. Consult

Bishop Butler, your favourite, and the favourite of every real enquirer into the principles of human conduct, and you will be satisfied concerning the truth of the doctrine.—Apply it, then, to the case of Hamlet: sense of supposed duty, and a regard to character, prompt him to slay his uncle; and he is with-held at that particular moment, by the ascendant of a gentle disposition; by the scruples, and perhaps weakness, of extreme sensibility. But how can he answer to the world, and to his sense of duty, for missing this opportunity? The real motive cannot be urged. Instead of excusing, it would expose him, he thinks, to censure; perhaps to contempt. He casts about for a motive; and one better suited to the opinions of the multitude, and better calculated to lull resentment, is immediately suggested. He indulges, and shelters himself under the subterfuge. He alledges, as direct causes of his delay, motives that

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that could never influence his conduct; and thus exhibits a most exquisite picture of amiable self-deceit. The lines and colours are, indeed, very fine; and not very obvious to cursory observation. The beauties of Shakespeare, like genuine beauty of every kind, are often veiled; they are not forward nor obtrusive. They do not demand, though they claim attention.

IV. I would now offer some observations concerning Hamlet's counterfeited or real madness: and as they are also intended to justify his moral conduct, let me beg of you to keep still in view, the particular circumstances of his situation, and the peculiar frame of his mind.

Harassed from without, and distracted from within, is it wonderful, if, during his endeavour to conceal his thoughts, he should betray inattention to those around him; incoherence of speech and manner; or break out inadvertently, into expressions

pressions of displeasure? Is it wonderful that he should "forego all mirth," become pensive, melancholy, or even morose? Surely, such disorder of mind, in characters like that of Hamlet, though not amounting to actual madness, yet exhibiting reason in extreme perplexity, and even trembling on the brink of madness, is not unusual. Meantime, Hamlet was fully sensible how strange those involuntary improprieties must appear to others: he was conscious he could not suppress them; he knew he was surrounded with spies; and was justly apprehensive, lest his suspicions or purposes should be discovered. But how are these consequences to be prevented? By counterfeiting an insanity which in part exists. Accordingly, to Ophelia, to Polonius, and others, he displays more extravagance than his real disorder would have occasioned. This particular aspect of the human mind is not unnatural; but is so peculiar

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culiar and so exquisitely marked, that he alone who delineated the commencing madness, the blended reason and distraction of Lear, hath ventured to pourtray its lineaments. That Hamlet really felt some disorder, that he studied concealment, and strove to hide his distraction under appearances of madness, is manifest in the following passage, among others of the same kind, where he discovers much earnestness and emotion, and at the same time, an affectation of sprightliness and unconcern:

Swear by my sword

Never to speak of this that you have heard.

GHOST. Swear by his sword.

HAM. Well said, old mole! can'st work i' the earth so fast?

A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.

HOR. O day and night, but this is wond'rous strange!

HAM. And therefore, as a stranger, give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.—

But

But come;—

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy!

GHOST. Swear, &c.

HAM. Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!

If we allow that the poet actually intended to represent Hamlet as feeling some distraction of mind; and was thus led to extravagancies which he affected to render still more extravagant, why, in his apology to Laertes, need we charge him with deviation from truth?

This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,
How I am punish'd with a fore distraction.

What I have done,

That might your nature, honour, and exception,
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.

Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never, Hamlet:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,

And, when he's not himself, does wrong Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.

Hamlet, no doubt, put to death Polonius; but without intention, and in the frenzy of tumultuous emotion. He might

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therefore say, both of that action and of the consequent madness of Ophelia,

Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil,
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house,
And hurt my brother.

Neither is his conduct at the funeral of Ophelia to be construed into any design of insulting Laertes. His behaviour was the effect of violent perturbation; and he says so afterwards, not only to Laertes, but to Horatio :

—— I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself, &c.
But sure, the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a tow'ring passion.

To this he alludes in his apology :

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And, when he's not himself, does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it nor ; Hamlet denies it.

The whole of his behaviour at the funeral, shews a mind exceedingly disorder-
ed,

ed, and thrown into very violent agitation. But his affection for Ophelia appears sincere ; and his regard for Laertes genuine. On recovery from his transport, to which, however, Laertes provoked him, how pathetic is the following expostulation :

———Hear you, Sir,
What is the reason that you us'd me thus ?
I lov'd you ever.

I have been the more minute in considering those particulars, that not only you, but Commentators of great reputation, have charged Hamlet, in this part of his conduct, with falsehood and inhumanity.

V. It remains that I should offer a few observations concerning Hamlet's jocularity. You seem to think it strange, that he should affect merriment when his situation is miserable, and when he feels his misery. Alas ! it is a symptom, too un-
ambi-

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ambiguous, of his affliction. He is so miserable, that he has no relish for any enjoyment; and is even weary of his existence.

O that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew! &c.

Thinking himself incapable of happiness, he thinks he should be quite unconcerned in any human event. This is another aspect of self-deceit: for in truth he is not unconcerned. Yet acting as if it were so, he affects to regard serious, and even important matters, with a careless indifference. He would laugh: but his laughter is not that of mirth. Add to this, that in those moments when he fancies himself indifferent or unconcerned, he endeavours to treat those actions which would naturally excite indignation, with scorn or contempt. This, on several occasions, leads him to assume the appearance of an ironical, but melancholy gaiety.

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This state of mind is exquisitely delineated in the following passage, where his affected melancholy betrays itself: and his gaiety and indifference, notwithstanding his endeavours to preserve them, relapse into his usual mood.

HOR. My Lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

HAM. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow student:

I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

HOR. Indeed, my Lord, it follow'd hard upon.

HAM. Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral bak'd meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven,

Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio.

From these remarks, I hope you will now agree with me, that Hamlet deserves compassion; and that Horatio may say of him, with propriety,

————— Good night, sweet Prince;
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

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The character is consistent. Hamlet is exhibited with good dispositions, and struggling with untoward circumstances. The contest is interesting. As he endeavours to act aright, we approve and esteem him. But his original constitution renders him unequal to the contest: he displays the weaknesses and imperfections to which his peculiar character is liable; he is unfortunate; his misfortunes are in some measure occasioned by his weakness: he thus becomes an object not of blame, but of tender regret. Such a character would have appeared to Aristotle peculiarly proper for theatrical representation.

F I N I S.



